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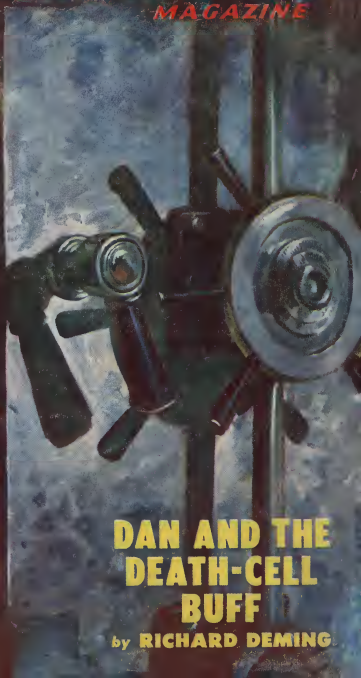


25¢

NEW

DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE



**DAN AND THE
DEATH-CELL
BUFF**

by **RICHARD DEMING**

START A Fine Business in Spare Time!

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IN THOSE TREES! I'D
BETTER GET OVER
THERE!

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PILOT OF A CRASHING PLANE DRIFT INTO
HEAVY TIMBER...



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ALL RIGHT?

YES... BUT
AM I GLAD TO
SEE YOU!

A
GIRL

HE FINDS GAIL WILSON, CO-OWNER
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THIS SERUM
DESPERATELY

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BOOK. LET'S
GO



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BE ABOUT HALF
AN HOUR

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ABOUT TOWN

SHE'S A PIP!
WISH I'D SHAVED
TODAY



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THE BARBER? I
WANT A QUICK
SHAVE

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YOU CAN USE



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A THIN
GILLETTE
BLADE FOR
YOU
THANKS



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THIS BLADE
OF YOURS.
SKIMMED 'EM
OFF SICK AS
A WHISTLE!

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COME TOO TOUGH
FOR THIN
GILLETES.
THEY'RE REALLY
KEEN!



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BRONXVILLE?
I'VE JUST JOINED
THE OAK HILLS
GOLF CLUB OUT
THERE

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YOU MUST
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YOU'RE
HANDSOME!

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DOUG FIND PLENTY TO TALK ABOUT.



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NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

Combined with **BLACK MASK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE**

Vol. 18

Contents for October, 1952

No. 2

TWO BIG NOVELETTES

DAN AND THE DEATH-CELL BUFF.....Richard Deming 12

Dan Fancy had fashioned a perfect frame for Boss Calhoun. But how could it fit, when the boss's victim preferred his death-cell to freedom?

CRY MURDER!.....Larry Holden 86

Sometimes a newspaper can be a deadly weapon, Augie, the reporter, knew. But you may have to guard against a back-fire. . . .

SHORT CRIME ACTION STORIES

THE THOUSANDTH MAN.....Aali Alexander 43

Could Mr. Bibb really read the crime on the blank, moonlit window?

NIGHT STOP.....Stuart Friedman 48

Too late, Jack knew he was driving a cargo of death. . . .

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE.....Winston Bouvé 59

Link Haley got one foot in the doorway, the other in his own grave.
Copyright 1954 by Popular Publications, Inc., under the title: "An Unfilled Grave."

THE TRAP.....Philip Ketchum 70

There are some things a smart stool pigeon would rather not know about.

THE VALISE.....Rufus Bakalor 79

It was the ancient switcheroo . . . with a twist that Little Dipper never forgot.

A NIGHT'S LODGING.....David Crewe 104

For generations, the MacPhersons had known neither fear nor defeat.
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THE WITNESS CHAIR

PROBABLY the dodges of the bad boys who want to collect insurance and think up ways and means of removing the frustrating living barrier to their aspirations, are the most fantastic in the weird world of crime. Among intricately twisted criminal mental processes which had bid fair at first to succeed, the drama of the two small corpses is really a winner.

Let Everett Ortner tell it:

The curtain went up with a bang on the night of July 29, 1925, as an earth-shaking explosion rocked the city of Oakland, California. Sheets of orange flame, from the two-story building that housed the Pacific Cellulose Company's laboratory, lighted the night. A black column of smoke rose against the evening sky.

The scream of sirens soon announced the arrival of firemen on the scene, and shortly after that the flames diminished, then disappeared. The fire had been put out before it attacked the second story, but the first story was gutted.

On the ground floor lay the charred

corpse of a slight little man with small hands and feet. His widow identified him shortly afterward. "It's Charlie, all right," sobbed Mrs. Charles H. Schwartz. "I can tell by the small hands and feet. And he had a tooth missing." She wept silently into her handkerchief. "I warned him so often to be careful," she cried. "I knew something like this would happen!"

The newspapers next day carried respectful obituaries concerning Dr. Charles H. Schwartz, the prominent chemist who had accidentally been killed in an explosion. And Dr. Schwartz's colleagues, shaking their heads, spoke in low, respectful tones of the departed.

But there were two men who weren't nearly as respectful. They were the two sheriff's deputies who had spent the day following the explosion prowling through the upper story of the laboratory and asking questions of nearby residents.

The first strange discovery they made was a closet in the second story. Cobwebs and dust bespoke its long disuse, yet, odd-

(Continued on page 8)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

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SAN JOSE • (AMORC) • CALIFORNIA

(Continued from page 6)

ly, the floor had the appearance of having been carefully scrubbed. But not carefully enough to remove strange dark stains in the wood. These pieces of wood the deputies carefully removed for laboratory examination.

Then the deputies went out to talk to the local people. One woman had something strange to tell them. She didn't know anything about the fire, she said, but there *was* something bothering her. Would the deputies like to hear about it? They would, very much.

"Well," she said, "yesterday afternoon—you know how hot it was; you couldn't breathe almost—a man came walking by, from the direction of the laboratory, wearing an *overcoat* with the collar turned up!"

But this odd bit of information didn't start to make sense until the report from the police laboratory came in. The stains on the flooring were blood.

An interesting fact came into headquarters then. Schwartz's widow stood to collect \$150,000 in insurance if Schwartz had died accidentally. The other possibility filled itself in. Or had Schwartz found a stand-in for his own coffin?

With this in mind, police combed through the debris of the explosion, searching for a clue to the identification of the corpse. Eventually they found a burned fragment of a Bible—with a name on it. Gil Barbe.

Up and down the West Coast now went police circulars. Did anyone know a man named Gil Barbe—small and slight, with small hands and feet? Someone did—a man in Los Angeles. Barbe had been a friend of his. An itinerant preacher, Barbe had written that he had found a new friend who would build him his own church. He was staying now, he wrote, with this new "friend."

The fact that the corpse was not Schwartz was now definitely established, for police surgeons, doing an autopsy, found

that the stomach contents of the corpse did not match up with what Schwartz had eaten in his last meal. Also, it was shown that the missing tooth had not been extracted in a normal fashion, but taken out with either a chisel or hammer.

So now police had a corpse and a motive. All they needed was a killer.

In the same city, Oakland, an Englishman named Hemingway was entertaining a friend of his who dropped in occasionally to stay a few days. The friend, Charles Warren, had been rather sad when he read in the newspapers about the accidental death of Dr. Schwartz.

Two days later, Oakland newspapers carried headline stories about the new identification of the corpse. Charles Warren read the papers with avidity, his face ashen.

The next day, the newspapers carried a picture of Dr. Charles Schwartz. By coincidence, it also happened to match exactly the features of Hemingway's friend, Charles Warren, Shaken, Hemingway conferred with a neighbor on this startling coincidence, then notified the police.

But the police never got their hands on Charles "Warren" Schwartz—alive. For as they closed in, a shot rang out from Schwartz's bedroom.

All that was left was a small, slight corpse with small hands and feet—and a blood brother to the corpse of the laboratory.

You won't want to miss the December issue of this magazine because it is going to have every variety of crime fiction, handmade to suit every taste. There will be crime-suspense stories by masters of that technique.

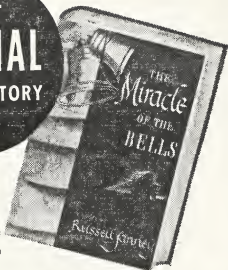
Nor do we wish to neglect that favorite of all detective features by M. E. Ohaver, "Solving Cipher Secrets"... All that plus "Strange Trails to Murder" and fascinating dramatized factual shorts will be ready and waiting on your newsstand September 19!

—The Editors.



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STRANGE PRISON BREAK

By Bill Seagram

There was nothing they could do when Kogut blew. . . .

NOT so very many years ago a San Quentin prisoner cheated the gallows to which he had been condemned by the most ingenious suicide on record.

William Kogut had been a silent, hard-working lumberjack of Polish descent. Though he had said little, he had always listened, and his retentive and curious mind had stored up a strange assortment of knowledge of little use to a semi-illiterate laborer.

Kogut became involved with a woman. At first they were happy together. Then the woman became ambitious. She jeered at Kogut for his lack of abilities, his low station in life. She went out with other men. One night, in a fit of mad rage, Kogut took his pocket knife and thrust it into the woman's heart.

The lumberjack made no effort to resist arrest but something in the back of his mind stirred him against public execution. His people in the old country had been simple peasants but they had all lived out their lives with honor. He would disgrace them.

He sat in his cell and pondered. Then the idea came to him. The scraps of knowledge he had picked up by listening to those better informed could serve him. In his small horde of private possessions there was a deck of playing cards. He separated the red suits from the others and tore out the hearts and diamonds from the cards. These he tore up into as minute

pieces as his clumsy, big, laborer's hands could manage. Next he ripped apart his prison cot until he found what he wanted, a bit of hollow tubing. He took the little red specks to the wash bowl and soaked them in water. When they were sufficiently soggy he forced them into the hollow tube.

Next he removed two pieces from the handle of the broom with which he was required to keep his cell clean and closed the openings of the tube. Now he put the tube over a small oil heater and lamp provided for his comfort and waited for the diabolic bomb to grow hot. At last it did—steam and gas began to generate within the tubing. Kogut put his head close to the thing.

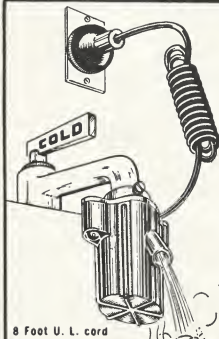
Then came the explosion. Its vibrations tumbled prisoners out of their beds throughout the prison; the walls of Kogut's cell were broken open. When perturbed prison authorities reached the cell they found only the remaining walls of the cell—dripping red. The inmate had disintegrated.

His store of knowledge had included the fact that playing cards are made of cellulose and the red printing contained glycerin. Trinitro cellulose, a powerful explosive is made from cellulose fibers; one of the major ingredients of many other explosives is glycerin.

Kogut's method of self-execution was not readily apparent under the circumstances. It took weeks of chemical and microscopic examination to piece together what had happened. ■ ■ ■

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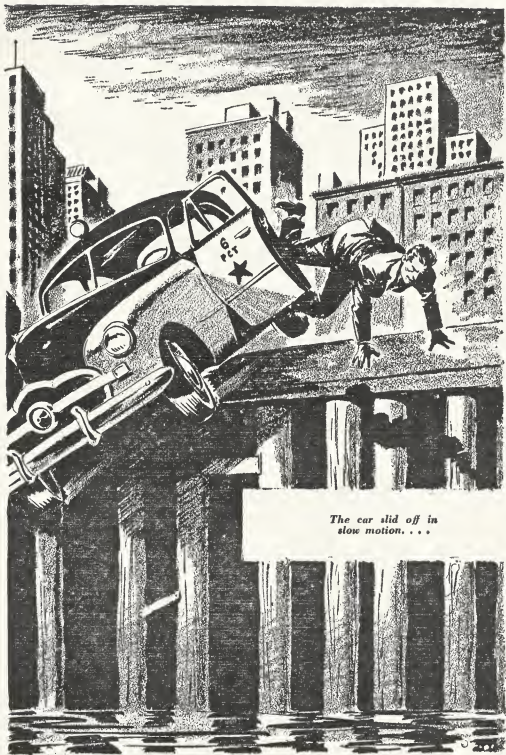


By
**Richard
Deming**

DAN AND THE DEATH- CELL BUFF

THE little sad-faced man in the worn seer-sucker suit arrived in Lake City on the nine-thirty A.M. train. He shook his head at the redcap who tried to relieve him of his bag, shook it again at the ring of eager taxi drivers, found his way to the waiting room and hunched his meager frame onto a bench in the

Dan Fancy had fashioned a perfect frame for a crime giant when he went after Big Jim Calhoun. But how could it fit the grim picture, when the boss's victim seemed to prefer his death-cell to the good air of freedom?



*The car slid off in
slow motion. . . .*

farthest corner. For an hour and a half he sat there quietly, staring sadly at his folded hands, and he was such an insignificant little man, no one gave him a second glance.

The big, heavy-shouldered man with the perennial lopsided grin arrived in Lake City on the eleven A.M. train. He, too, shook his head at the redcap, but he grinned when he did it, as though amused at the thought of hiring a youngster half his size to carry his heavy bag. He grinned again at the eager taxi drivers, said, "Later, maybe," and went on to the waiting room.

He was an enormous man, probably six feet four and two hundred and seventy pounds, but he moved with the controlled grace of a ballet dancer. His square, craggy face, lined by weather and seamed with laughter lines, looked forty; his iron-gray hair looked fifty. Actually he was thirty-six.

The little man barely glanced up when the big man entered, then returned his sad eyes to his hands. But suddenly the hands were clenched tautly together.

With his huge suitcase hanging as easily at his side as though it were a bag of cream puffs, the big man scanned the benches of the waiting room. His eyes touched the little man without interest, moved over the assorted dozen other people in the room and settled on a black-haired girl reading a magazine. She looked up at the same moment.

He grinned his lopsided grin, waited expectantly, and after studying him a moment, the girl rose and approached him.

"Mr. Fancy?" she asked tentatively.

He nodded, widening his grin and examining her with frank appreciation of her beauty, for she was as trim and flawless as a cut cameo. And not much bigger, the big man added mentally.

"Mr. Dan Fancy?" she persisted.

"How many people named Fancy do you think you'd find in one waiting room?" he asked quizzically. His voice was a husky, almost rasping bass.

She grinned, then, too. "I'm Adele Hud-

son. Mr. Robinson wired me to meet you and explain about the town."

"I know. Can it wait till I settle in a hotel and catch a shower? Trains make me feel gritty all over."

She was looking beyond him, through the waiting room door, and her face was suddenly pale. "I'm afraid it will have to wait," she said.

Dan turned so effortlessly, the movement seemed deliberate, but he was facing the door before the girl's sentence was finished. Two men in expensive gabardine suits entered the waiting room and stopped in front of him. One was a wide, barrel-chested man nearly as broad as he was tall, with a flat, swarthy face and a low forehead. The other was tall and lean, and carried himself with a sort of rawhide tenseness. He had a thin, cruel face and eyes containing no expression whatever. The tall man did the talking.

"Your name Fancy?"

Dan merely nodded.

Both men flashed badges, then slipped them back in their pockets.

"We got a tip you were arriving," the tall man said. "I'm Lieutenant Hart of Homicide and this is Sergeant Bull."

Dan examined the swarthy sergeant with interest. "Haven't I seen your picture on a reward poster somewhere?" he asked mildly.

Sergeant Bull's face reddened and his lips drew back in a snarl, but the tall lieutenant waved him aside and said quietly, "We don't like gunmen in Lake City, Fancy."

"So?" Dan asked.

"So let's start by turning over your gun."

Swinging his huge suitcase slightly forward, Dan let it drop with a crash. The barrel-chested sergeant jerked his toes out of the way just in time, turned brick red and stepped toward the big man with one hand raised to deliver a back-hand slap.

Dan regarded the sergeant's jaw with calm calculation, his lips grinning but his eyes narrowed ever so slightly. The barrel-

chedsted sergeant hesitated, let his hand drop and contented himself with snarling, "You heard the lieutenant. Let's see your heater."

"Sure," Dan said obligingly. His right hand flickered under his coat and reappeared with a forty-five automatic, which cocked with a distinct click. "Take a good look."

For a moment the bore centered directly in the sergeant's stomach, then Dan's thumb dropped the hammer to quarter-cock and the gun disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared.

"For the information of you lads and any other hoods around here who wear badges," Dan said huskily, "my permit to carry a gun is signed by the governor. So is my appointment as special investigator to find out what in hell's going on down here."

Unexpectedly both his big hands lashed out and grabbed a double handful of shirt-front. Jerking the two men off balance, he brought his fists together in front of his own chest so that one shoulder of each was clamped against one shoulder of his partner as they half-faced each other, and their other shoulders were crammed against Dan's chest, a position which effectively immobilized their arms. Nor in their side-wise position was either able to bring a knee into play.

They hung helpless in the big man's powerful grip, glaring up at him murderously as he grinned at them.

"Tell Big Jim Calhoun the war is on," Dan said huskily. "And next time not to send boys to do a man's job."

A sudden thrust sent both men reeling backward to sprawl either side of the doorway. Sweeping up his suitcase, Dan took the girl's arm and piloted her through the door. Without a backward glance he made for the group of taxi drivers, extended his suitcase to one by holding it with two sausage-like fingers through the strap, and grinned when the man was nearly jerked off center by its weight.

"You shouldn't have done that to Mor-

gan Hart and Larry Bull," Adele Hudson said breathlessly. "They're Big Jim Calhoun's foremost hired killers."

"Nice type to have on a police force," Dan grunted.

As they followed the loping cab driver, Adele's legs moved like twin pistons in her attempt to keep up with the big man's long strides. "I wonder how they knew you were arriving," she said.

Dan Fancy's grin became even wider than usual. "I sent Big Jim Calhoun an anonymous wire from Pittsburgh saying a private dick named Daniel Fancy had been engaged by Martin Robinson to get young Robinson out of death row, and that Fancy would arrive on the eleven A.M. train today. I signed it 'A Friend'."

The girl stopped in her tracks. "Whatever did you do a thing like that for? Are you trying to get killed?"

"No. Trying to get framed," Dan said cryptically.

Back in the waiting room, as the two plainclothesmen picked themselves up and began brushing themselves off, the sad-faced little man in the corner rose to his feet and unobtrusively left by the same door Dan and Adele had used. When he reached the group of taxi drivers, he surrendered his grip to one, nodded his head toward the retreating back of Dan Fancy, and said in a thin, reedy voice, "Five bucks if you keep the big fellow in sight without him catching on."

"WHAT'S the best hotel?" Dan asked Adele Hudson as he helped her into the cab.

"The Lakeview, but its rates are tremendous. We're in the middle of the tourist season, you know."

"With a millionaire paying expenses, I should quibble?" he inquired. To the driver he said, "Lakeview Hotel."

On the street Dan Fancy merely looked big, for his breadth was in proper proportion to his height except across the shoul-

ders, and their width tended to make him seem shorter than he was. But in the close confines of a taxi his size was hard to conceal. He was not built for taxis. His heavy shoulders spanned half the back seat, crowding the girl against the far window, where she sat like a toy doll, the top of her head barely even with Dan's collarbone.

"Tell me about the town," Dan said.

"Well—" the girl started uncertainly. "I'm not sure how much Mr. Robinson told you. If I knew that—"

"Nothing about the town, except it's as crooked as a Scotch walking stick. Just that his son was in the death house on a fake murder rap and I'm supposed to get him out. Also that you're the kid's fiancée, so presumably are trustworthy, and can give me the whole story."

"I see." She paused, frowning over her thoughts, then asked, "What was that you said to those detectives about being a special investigator for the governor? Mr. Robinson's wire said you were a private detective."

"The old man had an afterthought subsequent to wiring you. Seems another private dick he sent down here was arrested for vagrancy, beat up and kicked out of town two hours after he arrived. The governor is a personal pal of old man Robinson, so he armed me with enough authority to hit back in case any local cops start swinging. Makes it tough for the locals to work a vagrancy charge. Get on with your story."

"It's a rather long story," she said doubtfully, looking at the back of the taxi driver's head and then giving Dan a warning glance.

"Even the walls have ears, eh?" he said amusedly. "Look, Adele, there's nothing subtle about me. All I know how to do is wade in slugging with both hands. I've got no secrets from anybody, so talk up."

She glanced again at the driver, then said reluctantly, "The town is about fifty thousand population and it's ruled completely by Big Jim Calhoun. He owns a good part of it. Literally, I mean. Property deeds and

mortgages. Not any of the better part, or much of the main business district, but most of the property over east of the tracks is his. Saloons, amusement places, gambling houses. That sort of thing. He also owns the mayor, the city council, the police commissioner, the sheriff—this is the county seat, you know—the district attorney, the coroner and both city judges."

"How about newspapers?"

"There are two. The *Star* and the *Post*. Big Jim owns controlling interest in both, and since the *Star* owns our only local radio station, he controls that, too."

"In short, he's got the town sewed up tight," Dan said. "How does he use all this power?"

"To suck the lifeblood out of Lake City," Adele said savagely. "To protect his crooked gambling houses, to allow everything to run wide open. To peddle dope to school children, to extort money from merchants. And to kill anyone who gets in his way."

"H'm-m—" Dan remarked. "This is all general knowledge?"

"Everybody in Lake City knows the town is rotten to the core and that Big Jim Calhoun makes it that way."

Dan said thoughtfully, "You mentioned the population is fifty thousand. That's a lot of people to take a kicking around. Just figuring the adult males, you'd have the equivalent of at least one full infantry division, if somebody organized them. How come no honest citizen has tried?"

"Gene Robinson tried," the girl said dully. "And so did George Saunders, the man he was convicted of murdering. Others have tried and have ended up dead, or in the penitentiary on framed evidence. The civic leaders in the community are paralyzed with fear."

The taxi pulled up before the marquee of a large white-stone hotel. Without getting out, the driver reached over the seat to unlatch the door. Helping the girl to the sidewalk, Dan opened the front door, swung his suitcase out and slammed the door again.

Then the driver slipped the car into low.

"Aren't you going to wait for your fare?" Dan asked huskily.

Throwing him a startled glance, the cabbie wet his lips and mumbled, "One-fifty."

Dan gave him the exact change. "Your tip is the fifty bucks you'll get for phoning Big Jim our conversation."

"Huh?" the driver said.

"Tell him your passenger was Dan Fancy and he may make it seventy-five."

He picked up his suitcase and escorted Adele Hudson into the hotel.

"Why do you keep doing things like that?" she asked.

"Like what?"

"Sending Big Jim messages. Letting him know every move you make."

Dan stopped and looked down at the girl. "Look," he said gently. "Apparently both Mr. Robinson and you expected me to come down here and quietly nose around until I uncovered evidence that Gene Robinson is innocent. But in a setup like this there won't be any evidence. And we've got just seventeen days to get the kid out of death row. Our only possible chance is to stir up Big Jim to the point where he sticks his neck out, and then try to step on it. I intend to start a war that will tear this town apart. Want to back out, or come along for the ride?"

The girl looked up at him with slightly frightened eyes. "I'll come along," she said in a small voice. "But you underestimate Big Jim. You don't know him."

"What makes you think I don't?"

"Do you?" she asked in surprise.

"He was raised in Pittsburgh. As kids, we beat each other up and as teen-agers we worked in the same steel mill. Being a year and a half older than me, he could always lick me. I'm anxious to see if I've caught up to him yet."

After registering, Dan said to the girl, "I'm going to catch a shower before I do anything else. Want to wait in the cocktail lounge or come up and wait?"

"I'll come up," she decided.

As they entered the elevator, the little sad-faced man carried his grip through the front door. From the desk he watched the elevator indicator until it stopped at five. Then he turned his attention to the clerk, noted he was copying data from a registration card into a ledger, and read the room number of the card upside down. It was 512.

"I'd like a room with bath facing the lake on the fifth floor," he said. "I had five hundred and fourteen once before."

The clerk consulted a chart. "Five-fourteen is occupied, and so are the two rooms either side of it."

"How about five-ten?"

Superciliously, the clerk examined the little man's shabby seersucker suit. "That's vacant, sir, but it's a suite."

"I'll take it," the little man said.

AS THE bellhop, a slim, towheaded boy with a pug nose and a cocky grin, laid the big suitcase on its stand, Dan asked, "What's your name?"

"Billie."

Dan slipped him a five dollar bill. "When I ask for room service, I want you, Billie. Take care of me right and you may get an extra dime when I leave. You can start by getting a shaker of Tom Collinses up here in ten minutes."

"Yes sir, Mr. Fancy." The boy left the room with alacrity.

Tossing his coat on the bed, Dan followed it with his tie, shoulder holster, shirt and undershirt. Adele, seated on a chair near the window, watched him with startled, uneasy eyes. Happening to catch her expression, the big man grinned in amusement, then ignored her completely as he opened his bag and drew out some fresh clothing.

Stripped to the waist, Dan Fancy was a throwback to the Neanderthal man. From great shoulders like wedges of concrete to his fleshless waist, iron-hard muscle girded

his frame. A light matting of black hair covered his chest and arms like a sweater, and his deceptively deliberate movements, which could not quite conceal a catlike grace, added to the impression that he was a primeval being who would be more at home in a cave than a modern hotel room.

From nowhere the absurd vision of Dan Fancy dragging her into a cave by the hair popped into Adele's mind. Angrily she shook it out.

Ten minutes later there was a knock at the door. Adele rose to answer it, then hesitated as she remembered the byplay with the taxi driver. Suppose instead of room service, it was one of Big Jim's badged killers?

Glancing at the bed, she saw with surprise Dan's holster with its heavy forty-five was gone, and realized he had taken it into the bath with him. Apparently the big man was capable of caution in spite of his tendency to ask for trouble. Relieved, she opened the door.

"The Collinses, ma'am," Billie said, carrying in a tray containing a shaker and two frosted glasses.

The bellboy had hardly departed when Dan Fancy came out of the bathroom fully dressed. Over cool Tom Collinses she told him the story of Gene Robinson's conviction for murder.

"Gene was relatively new in Lake City, you know," she said. "About two years ago he came to town, and I guess I must have been the first person he talked to. I'm the owner and proprietor of Del's Beauty Salon, and he asked me for a job. I gave it to him. I suppose you knew he was a hairdresser?"

"Yeah," Dan grunted. "One of the reasons he never got along with the old man. His father thought he was a sissy."

"He isn't!" Adele said hotly. "Lots of men are in the beauty business. It's a perfectly honorable profession."

"All right," Dan said mildly.

For a moment the girl looked at him sus-

piciously, then went on with the story. "I knew, of course, that Gene was the son of Martin Robinson, the millionaire steel man, but I doubt that anyone else in town did. Gene was bitter about their break and never mentioned his father. Mr. Robinson disowned him, you know, when he refused to enter the steel business."

"I know," Dan said.

"Until the trial it never came out who Gene was, or I don't think they would have tried to frame him. It's one thing to push around citizens of a town you own, but quite another to pick on the son of a nationally known figure. I imagine Big Jim Calhoun had a few uneasy moments when those big-time defense lawyers from Pittsburgh began to arrive in town. I think probably they would simply have killed Gene and made it look like an accident, had they known who he really was."

"The advantage of having a big-shot parent," Dan said dryly. "You get killed instead of framed."

"Of course as it turned out it didn't matter anyway, because Gene refused to accept any help from his father and wouldn't even talk to the lawyers he sent down. The court finally had to appoint a defense lawyer, and that ended Gene's chances, for the lawyer he appointed was just another tool of Big Jim's."

"Tell me about the killing," Dan said.

"It happened about a month ago. George Saunders, the man who was killed, was a tavern owner in the same block where I have my beauty salon. He was a fiery, soap-box type of man, and I never liked him particularly. I don't believe Gene did either, but he worked with him on the citizens' committee because he believed in what Mr. Saunders was doing."

"What was the citizens' committee?"

"It was something George Saunders got up. A sort of vigilante outfit composed of merchants who wanted to break Jim Calhoun's power. It was supposed to be secret, but George Saunders was constitutionally

incapable of keeping his mouth shut, and practically everyone in town knew he was the leader and Gene was second in command."

Dan looked interested. "So the chief of the citizens' committee gets killed, and his first lieutenant takes the rap for it? Convenient for Big Jim. What happened to the committee?"

"It collapsed," Adele said bitterly. "All the fight went out of it and the members scampered for their holes like frightened rats."

The big man said, with a strange air of tolerance, "Don't be bitter at them, Adele. Even brave men sometimes rout without leadership. How was the frame worked?"

"With Big Jim's usual efficiency," Adele said in a weary voice. "At the trial a half dozen witnesses testified George Saunders made a practice of teasing Gene about being a hairdresser. That wasn't true, incidently. The same witnesses testified the two had come to blows over it the day before the murder, and Gene threatened to kill George. A pawnbroker testified Gene bought the gun identified as the murder weapon. Five witnesses testified they were customers in Saunders' saloon when Gene entered and fired five shots into Saunders' body. The arresting officers, who happened to be the same two you met at the station, said they heard the shots, rushed into the tavern while Gene was still firing, and overpowered him. What could the jury do? They convicted him."

"The kid have any defense?"

"None anyone would believe. I was off that day and Gene was responsible for closing the shop. He said he had just locked the front door when two masked men entered the back way, covered him with pistols and kept him there for three hours. About eight P.M., just as it began to get dark, they forced him out the back door and down the alley to the rear of Saunders' tavern, where they all entered through the kitchen. The two masked men told him to

walk straight ahead into the barroom, but they themselves stayed back in the kitchen out of sight, and presumably left again by the back door as soon as Gene obeyed them.

"Gene said several men were in the tavern, apparently awaiting him, and two of them were Lieutenant Morgan Hart and Sergeant Larry Bull. At the time George Saunders was lying dead behind the bar, but Gene didn't know this. Lieutenant Hart thrust a gun at Gene by the barrel and said, 'Here. Take this.' When Gene refused, the lieutenant slapped him twice, so Gene took the gun. Then he was arrested for murder."

Dan grinned. "Bet the prosecution had a circus with that."

"It was terrible. Even the judge obviously thought it was a lie. When he summed up, he told the jury it was up to them to weigh the statements of eleven reputable citizens and two officers of the law against the unsupported testimony of the defendant."

"Was the judge in on the frame?"

The girl shook her head. "I don't think so. It was Judge Anderson of the circuit court. I think he comes out of Mayville. Big Jim's power doesn't reach up into the state courts."

Dan rose and stretched. "Let's go down and have lunch. Afterward you can go back to your shop, if you like, while I sit in my room and wait for Big Jim to make a move."

Adele said hesitantly, "I'd like to stay with you, if I may."

The big man shrugged indifferently. "All right, if you wish."

CHAPTER TWO

Death Row Stogie

AS THE elevator swallowed Dan and Adele, the door to suite 510 opened cautiously. The little man, wearing a fresh seersucker suit as worn as the first,

stepped out in the hall with his suitcase in his hand. Quickly he approached room 512, for a moment fiddled at the lock with a piece of wire, pushed open the door and shut it behind himself again.

Rolling the bed away from the wall, he spread his handkerchief on the floor, removed a small brace and bit from his bag, and drilled a hole through the baseboard, allowing the sawdust to fall on his handkerchief. When he felt the bit break through on the other side, he carefully folded the handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

Then he pushed two wires attached to a small microphone through the hole, screwed the mike to the baseboard, rolled the bed back in place and repacked his bag. The whole operation took no more than fifteen minutes.

Dan and Adele had been back from lunch barely a half hour, and were desultorily smoking cigarettes when a knock came at the door. Adele, in her chair by the window, stopped her cigarette halfway to her lips and gave Dan a frightened look. Dan, flat on his back on the bed, came erect lazily and swung his feet over the side.

"Come in!" he called.

The man who opened the door was a giant, towering above Dan Fancy a good three inches and outweighing him thirty pounds. He was blond and chubby-faced and had the slightest suggestion of a paunch, but most of his weight consisted of muscle as solid as Dan's. His pink face, with its upturned nose, was that of a cherub, but his small bright eyes spoiled the effect. They were the eyes of a hawk, and they glittered coldly when his lips smiled.

Dan gave him a lopsided grin. "Never stopped growing, did you, Jim? Thought I'd have passed you by now."

"You're a long way from Pittsburgh, Dan," Big Jim Calhoun said quietly. He glanced at Adele, jerked his head toward the open door and said, "Outside, honey."

The girl made no move.

"Better do like the man says, Adele," Dan told her huskily.

Her face pale, Adele rose and walked to the door. There she paused and gave Dan an appealing look.

Fancy chuckled amusedly. "He won't eat me, Adele. Wait in the hall."

When the door had closed behind her, Big Jim Calhoun walked over to the bed and smiled without humor at the seated man.

Dan rested his right ankle on his left knee and leaned back on his elbows.

"You didn't need to be so careless, Dan," Big Jim said softly. "I could be all over you before you moved."

Without taking his eyes from the other man's, Dan shook his head. "If you move an inch closer, my heel will break your kneecap."

Momentarily the giant's eyes clouded. Then he stepped back and walked around the bed.

Effortlessly Dan came to his feet and turned to keep his face toward Big Jim.

"What do you want, Dan?" the giant abruptly asked.

"I want to get a kid named Gene Robinson out of death row over at the state pen."

Big Jim said impatiently, "He's a convicted murderer. He had a fair trial."

Dan said carefully, "I don't give a hoot in Hades about your rackets down here, Jim. All I'm interested in is the kid." He paused and examined the other's cherubic face estimatingly. "I'll give you a choice, Jim. Throw the real killer to the wolves so the kid can go free, and I'll leave you alone."

"What's the other half of the choice?"

"Fight me and I'll bust your organization wide open."

Big Jim shrugged with apparent indifference. "That's a big order for one man. Even a guy with your reputation." His tone turned sardonic. "How many crooks have you killed now? Five or six? It's been in the papers, but I lost count."

"Let's stick to the subject," Dan suggested.

Big Jim's smile widened without affecting the coldness of his eyes a single degree. "You don't worry me a bit, Dan. The only reason I dropped in is for old time's sake. To pass a friendly warning. Be out of town by six tonight."

"Or?" Dan asked.

"Or you get the works. You can't buck me, Dan. Not here, you can't. I own this town, lock, stock and barrel. I can get away with anything. I could kill you right now, and the cover-up would be so complete, I'd never be touched."

Dan's lopsided grin grew in dimension. "Wrong, Jim. Passing over the certainty that you'd have a hole in your head before you got your gun out, you couldn't afford to bump me off. You may be the big frog in your own little puddle, but you're not big enough to cover the murder of a special investigator for the governor. You're worried silly, or you wouldn't be here. Get smart and make it easy for both of us by turning in Saunders' real killer."

Big Jim shook his head. "Sorry, Dan. No chance." He studied the big man and said in a tentative voice, "Don't suppose it would be worth-while to offer you money?"

"You got a million dollars?"

Big Jim's grin was a trifle crooked. "Same price as always, eh? I remember when we were kids you used to say you wouldn't be crooked for less than a million dollars. That's why you're still working for peanuts, and I own a city."

"Only till today, Jim. Tomorrow you lose the city, but I'll still have my peanuts. I've got a little paper signed by the governor, Jim. Tomorrow morning early I'll be at the courthouse. I'm confiscating all city and county records."

The giant chuckled. "You'll run into a battery of lawyers and a squad of cops."

"They'll be dead lawyers and dead cops if they get in my way. My paper authorizes me to call on militia."

Jim's smile faded. "The governor wouldn't go that far. You can't invade an incorporated community with militia against the consent of the local authorities."

"Read your state constitution. In the public interest the governor can order militia anywhere in the state where local authority has broken down or is *incompetent*. The governor seems to think yours is incompetent."

"He wouldn't dare!"

Dan laughed aloud. "He dared to sign the paper, Jim. And I'll damn well dare to use it."

"Let's see the paper."

Dan shook his head. "Phone the governor if you want verification. I like my hands free when we're in the same room."

Big Jim's bright eyes became narrow. "Then I guess it's war, Dan. Don't say I didn't warn you." He rounded the bed and held out a hand the size of a pancake griddle. "No hard feelings, though, no matter how it comes out."

"Of course not, Jim."

Dan stuck a hand only slightly smaller into that of Big Jim. A slight smile touched the giant's lips as he suddenly jerked Dan toward him and started a vicious left cross.

The blow never landed. Expecting the maneuver, Dan added his own impetus to Big Jim's powerful pull, and smashed his left elbow into the other's jaw. Big Jim reeled backward, recovered his balance and surged forward again.

At the same moment the door behind Dan opened. With a catlike shift, he sidestepped the giant's rush and half turned to meet the new adversary. That was as far as he got when a sap caught him behind the ear.

He managed the rest of the turn with a great ringing in his ears. Through the wrong end of a telescope he saw thin-faced Lieutenant Hart in the room. Then the contorted face of Big Jim Calhoun appeared before him and a huge fist started toward his jaw.

His mind willed a left-hand parry, but his arm refused to obey the command.

DAN awakened with his head in a lap and with soft arms around his neck. He looked up clearly at Adele Hudson's face just as a drop of warm salt water landed on his nose.

"What are you crying about?" he asked thickly. "I'm the one who got belted."

Her arms tightened convulsively. "Oh, Dan! I thought you were dead."

The big man disengaged her arms and rose to his feet. She too rose from her seated position on the floor.

"You're a nice kid, Adele," he said gently.

Her face flaming, she turned abruptly and walked to the window.

Gingerly he fingered the lump behind his ear, then prodded one finger along the base of his jaw. "What happened to my guest?"

With her back still to him, she said, "Big Jim? He and that lieutenant he owns left right after they knocked you out. Big Jim had a paper in his hand and seemed pleased about something."

Quickly Dan's hand darted to his inside coat pocket and came out empty. "Now he knows what a liar I am," he said ruefully. "That paper was signed by the governor, but all it said was that I was authorized to reinvestigate the circumstances of George Saunders' death, and requested the local police to cooperate."

The girl turned to face him. "What are you going to do now?"

The big man ignored her question. He was thoughtfully regarding the baseboard near his bed, against which he had apparently fallen when slugged by Big Jim, for the bed was pushed to one side. Dropping to his hands and knees, he studied the small microphone curiously. Then, placing his lips close to it, he suddenly emitted an ear-splitting shriek.

Through the wall to the room next door, they could distinctly hear a startled curse.

Grinning, Dan moved the bed back in place while the girl regarded him open-mouthed. "Just mark it up that I'm crazy," he said. "Got a car?"

She shook her head.

"Then we'll rent one. It's twenty miles to the state prison, and I want to visit Gene Robinson."

Crossing to the phone, he called the state capitol and arranged for permission to visit the prisoner in death row. The assistant state's attorney said he would phone the warden immediately, so that Dan and Adele would be expected when they arrived.

The red tape disposed of, they walked three blocks to the nearest car rental, where Dan managed to obtain a 1948 Buick that seemed to be in excellent condition.

As they pulled away from the garage, Dan said casually, "Don't look around, but we're being followed."

Adele caught her breath. In spite of the warning, she half turned, but settled front again when the big man frowned at her.

"Big Jim?" she asked.

"Not personally. Probably a stooge. A short, heavy-set man in a plaid suit. Bald-headed. Looks like a salesman. I thought I noticed him watching us when we crossed the hotel lobby. He rented a Lincoln and pulled out right behind us."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," Dan said. "Let him follow."

During the twenty mile trip to the state prison, Dan made no attempt to shake the Lincoln, but kept his car at an even fifty-five most of the way, and dropping to forty over the short stretch of mountain road marking the halfway point. In the rear-view mirror he could see the other car maintained an even hundred yard interval. But when they stopped before the prison gates, the Lincoln rolled on past without slackening speed. Seconds later a battered sedan driven by a little man in a worn seersucker suit flashed by in the wake of the Lincoln.

As the assistant state's attorney had

promised, the warden was expecting them. Greeting them courteously, he turned them over to the assistant warden, who in turn left them with the chief guard in that section of the prison containing the death house. Here Dan was relieved of his gun before he and Adele were led back to the somber death row.

The long corridor leading to the execution chamber contained four cells, but only one was occupied. Gene Robinson lay on a bunk reading the *Saturday Review of Literature*, while immediately outside his cell a yawning suicide guard sat on a straight-backed chair trying to keep awake.

Robinson was a slim, graceful man with even, almost pretty features and a pencil-line mustache. He had the longest eyelashes Dan Fancy had ever seen on a man.

When he saw Adele, he smiled a dazzling white smile, rose from his bunk and said, "Hello, dear. It was good of you to come."

Like welcoming her to a tea, Fancy thought. He waited while Adele offered a dutiful kiss through the bars, and frowned slightly when the condemned man accepted the offer with a reserved reluctance indicating he considered it not quite in good taste to demonstrate affection in front of strangers.

Gene Robinson was a curious man. He seemed not in the slightest degree worried, and his manners were impeccably correct.

"My name is Dan Fancy," the big man rumbled. "I'm a private investigator, and I've been engaged to get you out of this spot."

Robinson raised one eyebrow. "By whom, please?"

"Your father."

The young man's teeth continued to glitter, but the welcome was gone from his smile. "I don't accept help from my father, Mr. Fancy. I'm afraid I can't use you."

Dan moved one big hand impatiently. "Your old man told me all about that. He doesn't expect any thanks."

"Then he didn't tell you enough. I'm

sorry you've been troubled, Mr. Fancy, but you're wasting your time."

Turning his attention back to Adele, Robinson ignored the big man. For a moment Dan watched him broodingly.

"Your old man told me enough," he said finally. "You've been a poet by profession, and before that you were an artist, and before that a musical composer. Only you never made a dime at any of those professions, so you took up hairdressing as a sort of substitute art. You like to associate with people who work with their minds."

"You never had any respect for your old man because the money he educated you in Europe on was made in the disgusting business of manufacturing steel. You never let him forget he started out as a day laborer. He was a peasant and you were an aristocrat. Finally when your snobbery got too far under his skin, he kicked you out. When he got over his mad, he asked you back again, with you writing the ticket. But aristocrats don't accept largess from peasants."

The big man paused, then went on huskily. "You're living in a dream world, kid. Aristocrats are mortal, just like people. In seventeen days they'll strap you in the electric chair. You've got your old man crazy enough now with your martyr act. Come awake and start cooperating. I want some questions answered."

"I'm afraid I don't like you, Mr. Fancy," Robinson said frigidly. "Please inform my father I'm quite capable of taking care of myself."

"Sure you are. Want to bet when they strap you in the chair, you won't break wide open and start screaming for your father? But then it'll be too late."

"Guard!" the condemned man said crisply. "Please take Mr. Fancy away. I don't wish to talk to him."

WITHOUT waiting for the guard's reaction, Dan turned and strode toward the barred and locked door of the cell block.

As he walked away, he heard Adele say, "Please, Gene. Don't make things so difficult. All that Mr. Fancy is trying to do is help."

During the first mile of the ride back the girl was so quiet, Dan realized she was making an effort not to cry.

Finally he said irritably, "The guy is a psycho, you know."

Startled, she glanced sidewise at him.

"Delusions of grandeur," Dan said. "Nothing can touch him. A miracle will happen to get him out of his jam at the last minute, and then he won't owe his dad a thing." He glowered at the road ahead. "He doesn't know it, but the miracle is that his old man even bothered to try to help him. I'd let him fry."

"Don't say that!" Adele said passionately. "Gene is a fine man. He's just too proud and stubborn for his own good."

Dan glanced at her curiously. "How'd he happen to condescend to become engaged to you? You read all the correct books?"

A slow blush diffused her face. "I thought you were so particular about taking advantage of a man in death row."

"Sorry," he said tersely, and lapsed into silence.

A mile farther on he remarked, "Our shadow is with us again."

The girl tensed, but did not look around. "The same man?"

Dan nodded. "Don't worry about it. Apparently all he wants is to see where we go."

But when they reached the short stretch of mountain road Dan began to wonder if the Lincoln was solely interested in tailing them, for in the rear-view mirror he could see the gap between the two cars was slowly being closed. When it had decreased from a hundred yards to a hundred feet, he glanced reflectively at the guard rails flashing by at their right, thin wooden rails which in places edged a sheer hundred foot drop.

The next curve, Dan remembered, formed a narrow horseshoe and the bank fell away nearly vertically over a deep chasm. His lips thinned as the Lincoln edged nearer and suddenly started to pass just short of the curve.

Aside from his tightened mouth the big man gave no indication that he even noticed the other car until it came fully abreast. Then suddenly he slammed on the brakes.

The Lincoln cut in viciously at the same moment, nearly touching the rail a mere car length ahead of the point where the Buick slid to a screeching halt. Careening around the curve, it disappeared in a burst of power.

"He tried to kill us!" Adele gasped, pushing herself back in her seat.

"He would have," Dan said grimly, "if I hadn't braked a split second ahead of his swing."

Shifting into low, he lifted the speed to forty again, but made no attempt to catch the Lincoln.

It was just before five when Dan dropped Adele in front of her beauty shop. Returning the car to its rental garage, he walked moodily back to his hotel, not even bothering to ask the garage attendant for the name of the renter of the Lincoln. In front of the hotel his moodiness increased when he discovered the thin, sharp-nosed man who had been staring vacantly into a dry-cleaning window next door to the garage when he returned the car, was now staring just as vacantly into a jewelry window fifteen feet from the hotel entrance.

Momentarily he toyed with the idea of pitching the shadow into the gutter by the seat of the pants, but decided against it. Just the thought, however, somewhat relieved his feelings.

As he crossed the lobby, Dan saw Billie, the bellhop, standing near the front desk, and crooked a finger at the boy. Billie scampered over like an eager dog, a wide grin splitting his features.

"Yes sir, Mr. Fancy?"

"What does the hotel do with old newspapers, Billie? Sell them to a junkman?"

The boy looked puzzled. "Yes sir. I believe so."

"Probably stores them somewhere in the basement until they get a big enough pile to sell, eh?"

"I guess so, sir. Did you want a particular back issue?"

"Thirty of them," Dan said. "See if you can find me every issue for the past month. Either local paper. I'll be in my room."

It did not take Billie long. Within twenty minutes he delivered a thick stack of the *Lake City Star*. Piling them on the floor in front of the window chair, the big man went through them unhurriedly, reading every item he found on the killing of George Saunders and the subsequent trial and conviction of Eugene Robinson.

It was nearly seven when he finished the pile, and the only new information he had gained was the names of the witnesses who had testified against Robinson. Picking up the phone, he ordered dinner sent up to his room, and while waiting for it, methodically went through the phone book and listed on a sheet of paper the phone numbers of all those witnesses he found listed. All, peculiarly enough, were men. Of the five who had testified to bad blood between the deceased and the defendant, three were listed in the book. Of the six who were actual witnesses to the shooting according to their testimony, four possessed phones. The pawnbroker who had testified to Gene Robinson's purchase of the murder gun had a business phone, but none listed for a residence.

Dinner arrived and the big man wolfed it hurriedly, eager to get on with his work. As soon as he finished gulping the last of his coffee, he pushed the dining cart aside, lit a cigarette and seated himself on the bed by the telephone.

The first number he called was that of a man named Adolph Striker, one of the witnesses to the alleged teasing of Robinson

by the murdered man. A woman answered the phone, peremptorily announced that Mr. Striker was "on vacation" and could not be reached for two months. She hung up before Dan could ask any questions.

In chronological order he went down the list, and every number got him a variation of the first reaction. Some of the men had moved and left no forwarding addresses, some were "out of town for a while," and the informants had no idea how they could be reached. Some simply bluntly denied ever hearing of the person asked for.

The operator answered when he called the last number on the list—that of the pawnbroker.

"That number has been disconnected, sir," she told him.

Slowly the big man crumpled to a ball the list of names he had made and dropped the ball in a wastebasket. For a long time he sat in the window-side chair, his feet cocked on the sill and his hands locked behind his head. He smoked two cigarettes, arced the butts out the window, and stared glumly at nothing.

Suddenly a startled expression crossed his face, lingered and developed into a pleased grin. Rising to his feet, he thumbed the phone book once more until he came to the name: Bull, Lawrence. He copied the address on a card which he put in his wallet. Then whistling noiselessly, he left the hotel and hailed a passing cab.

"Seventeen-eleven Fairview Avenue," he said loudly for the benefit of the thin, sharp-nosed man who had trailed him out of the hotel lobby and now stood idly in the entrance.

As he expected, a second taxi pulled out from the curb a few moments after his.

1711 Fairview Avenue was a white frame house in one of the nicer sections of town. A stupid looking but pretty blonde in a tight-fitting red dress answered Dan's ring.

"Looking for Sergeant Larry Bull," the big man said.

The woman's expression as she examined

his huge frame was that of a cattle buyer judging a steer, and a flicker of animal interest appeared in her eyes.

"Come in," she said, stretching the "in" to an open invitation.

She led him through a hallway into an elaborately furnished living room where the police sergeant sat watching television. Dan estimated that the furnishings of the living room would have cost two years of an honest policeman's salary.

When Sergeant Bull looked up at his visitor, his eyes hardened. Rising, he cut the television switch and said to the blonde in a flat voice, "Scram."

The woman's mouth turned sullen and her eyes flicked sidewise once more at Dan, but she turned obediently and left the room, slamming the door behind her.

"Well?" Bull asked.

"Just remembered where I saw your picture," Dan said easily. "Armed robbery and murder in St. Louis about nineteen forty-six. Can't remember the name, but it wasn't Bull."

CHAPTER THREE

Hide-and-Seek With Death

SERGEANT Larry Bull's flat face turned the color of paper, but his eyes remained expressionless and hard. For a long time his gaze remained unwaveringly fixed on the big man's grin.

"What do you want?" he asked finally.

"Nothing," Dan said. "Absolutely nothing. I'm not going to turn you in. Just wanted you to know I recognized you."

"Why?" Bull asked flatly, but the big man only grinned at him.

Puzzlement and wariness mixed with the fear in the sergeant's face. "You know you're giving me a damn good reason to knock you off. You're not that dumb, Fancy. What's the angle?"

"No angle. Does Big Jim know you're wanted for murder in Missouri?"

Bull licked his lips. "No."

"Want him to?"

"No." The man watched Dan's face, a waiting expression on his own.

"Might give him a toe hold on you, eh?" Dan asked. "You don't mind working for Jim Calhoun, but you wouldn't want to be in a spot where you couldn't quit, would you?"

"What do you want?" Bull demanded.

The big man simulated surprise. "Nothing, I told you. Nothing at all. I'm not going to inform the Missouri cops, and I'm not going to tell Big Jim. You can depend on it."

"You must want something," the sergeant insisted worriedly. "If you're working up a deal where you expect me to cross Big Jim, forget it. I'd rather face Missouri."

Dan shook his head and grinned hugely. "You're an untrusting soul, Sergeant." Opening the door by reaching behind himself and turning the knob, he backed out of the room.

He was still grinning when he pushed the door shut again.

Back at the hotel the big man put in a long-distance call to Martin Robinson.

"Fancy!" the old man said sharply. "I've been going crazy waiting to hear from you. Have you seen Gene?"

"Yes," Dan said shortly. "He's bearing up. Think I have a lead."

"Yes?" The old man's voice was eager.

"For five thousand bucks and a guarantee of immunity one of the arresting officers will repudiate his original story and sign a full confession to the whole frame."

"Five thousand?" Martin Robinson's tone made it sound like five cents. "Well, for goodness sakes, Fancy, promise it to him. I'll wire it immediately."

"Good. I'm in room five-twelve of the Lakeview Hotel."

He hung up before the old man could ask any questions.

* * *

The short, burly man with the bald head

rapped quietly on the bar at the Downtown Athletic Club, bringing the bartender from his dreams of a chicken farm.

"Hello, Stub," the barman said.

"Big Jim in?" The burly man's voice was as soft as his manner. Everything about him was soft, except his eyes, which could have chipped sparks from a piece of flint.

"Yeah. He's expecting you. Go on up."

Stub approached a door at the side of the bar and waited. The bartender's foot touched a concealed button, a low buzz sounded, and Stub pushed open the door. He followed a narrow hallway to the open door of a self-service elevator, pushed the button marked 2 and rose silently to the second floor. When the elevator door slid back, another steel-grilled door barred his exit from the car.

Facing him from behind a desk across the room sat Big Jim Calhoun.

"It's Stub, Mr. Calhoun," the baldheaded man called.

Another buzz sounded. Stub pushed open the steel door and let it swing shut behind him. His eyes flicked briefly at Lieutenant Morgan Hart, who sat with his back against one wall, then returned to Big Jim.

"I kept Fancy in sight all day," Stub reported in his soft voice. "Gyp Fleming relieved me at five."

"You didn't make a special trip over here, just for that?" the blond giant asked.

"No." The burly man glanced at Lieutenant Hart. "He rented a car and drove up to the prison to visit Gene Robinson. He took Adele Hudson along with him. Following your orders to take advantage of any situation where it would look like an—ah—accident, I cut him off on the mountain road so short it should have pushed him over a hundred-foot bank. He was expecting it and he crossed me up."

"You still haven't said anything that couldn't have waited till tomorrow," Big Jim said irritably.

"No," Stub agreed. "It's coming now. I left word for Gyp to phone me if anything

special developed, and he just phoned me at home." His eyes again flicked at Lieutenant Hart, then moved back to Big Jim. "I want to report this privately."

A frown disturbed the cherubic blandness of Big Jim's expression. "You can talk in front of Morg. You know that."

"Yes, sir. Generally. I'd prefer to report this privately."

Big Jim's eyes narrowed and swung to Morgan Hart. The homicide officer rose with a mixture of puzzlement and suspicion tingeing his expression.

"What you getting at, Stub?" he asked belligerently.

"Speak up," Big Jim commanded, his voice nearly as soft as Stub's. "If Morg doesn't like it, he can learn to."

The baldheaded man shrugged. "I'll give you the full report in order, including what we got from the phone tap. About a half hour after you left his room, Fancy put in a call to the state justice department and arranged to see Gene Robinson at the prison. Like I told you, he rented a car and took the girl with him. They were at the prison about forty-five minutes. When they got back to town, he dropped off the girl, returned the car and went back to the hotel. That's when I dropped out and Gyp Fleming took over.

"Fancy had a bellhop find him a month's back issues of the *Star*, and stayed in his room with them about an hour and a half. At seven he had dinner sent up. At seven-fifteen he started making phone calls. He made eight, and these are the numbers." He laid a half-sheet of paper on Big Jim's desk. "From the names he asked for whenever he got an answer, I guess he was calling all the witnesses in the Robinson trial." Stub smiled briefly. "He didn't have any luck."

"He wouldn't," Big Jim said without interest.

"About eight he left the room and grabbed a cab to Larry Bull's house. He was inside about fifteen minutes. Then he

returned to the hotel and phoned Martin Robinson in Pittsburgh."

Stub paused and for the third time his eyes moved to Lieutenant Morgan Hart. "This is where I wanted it to be private. Bull is a pal of the lieutenant's."

Hart's eyes narrowed to slits. "What about Larry?"

"Go on," Big Jim ordered.

The baldheaded man shrugged. "Fancy told Robinson he had a lead. He said one of the arresting officers in the Saunders murder was willing to repudiate his testimony for a guarantee of immunity and five thousand bucks. Robinson promised to wire the money."

"I don't believe it," Morgan Hart said flatly.

Stub raised brows over eyes as hard as steel knives. "You mean I made it up?" he asked softly.

The homicide officer took a step toward the bald man, both of his fists clenched.

"Cut it!" Big Jim said. His eyes moved with displeasure from one to the other of his men. "Get Bull over here," he ordered Morgan Hart. "Don't tell him why. Just get him here."

Without a word the lieutenant strode into the elevator. The steel door clanged and the elevator door slid shut.

"Think that's wise?" Stub asked. "Sending Hart, I mean."

Big Jim glared at him irritably. "Morgan would kill his mother if I told him to. And when I need punks to advise me, I'll let you know. Sit down and shut up."

The bald man blinked rapidly and a film settled over his eyes. He took the chair Morgan Hart had deserted and sat looking straight ahead. Big Jim opened a ledger and began adding figures.

Twenty minutes later Morgan Hart returned with Sergeant Larry Bull. He left the sergeant standing in front of Big Jim's desk, and retired to a corner himself. Bull's flat face wore a faintly worried expression.

"Dan Fancy called on you tonight," Big

Jim said without preamble. "What did he want?"

The sergeant flushed. "I don't know. He just asked some silly questions."

"Like what?"

"Like—I don't know. I don't remember exactly."

"You mean you don't want to remember?" Big Jim asked softly.

The sergeant looked alarmed. "No, sir. It wasn't anything important. Nothing about the Saunders murder."

Big Jim's cherubic face became even more cherubic. "Now why would you mention the Saunders murder if he didn't talk about it?"

Bull's alarm visibly increased. "That's why he's down here, isn't it? I mean, I thought it was funny he didn't mention it."

Big Jim nodded agreement. "Very funny. My sides practically ache." He dropped his eyes to the ledger again. "That's all I wanted, Bull," he said quietly. "Go on home."

An expression of incredulous relief flooded the sergeant's flat face. "Sure, boss," he said hurriedly, backing into the elevator.

When the elevator door had closed, Big Jim looked up at the two remaining men. "Arrange it as soon as you possibly can," he said casually. "Dan Fancy will be the sucker, of course. And make it fool-proof. We'll probably have the best defense lawyers in the country defending Fancy, and I want it so tight *nothing* can upset the apple-cart."

DAN rose at eight, had breakfast in his room, and phoned Adele Hudson about nine. She was cool over the phone, apparently having not entirely forgiven him for his frank comments about her fiancé, but she agreed to have lunch with him. He arranged to meet her in the hotel cocktail lounge at eleven.

Over a Manhattan her coolness melted a trifle, particularly after Dan made a point of apologizing for his frankness. It was a somewhat oblique apology, however.

"I shouldn't have sounded off the way I did about young Robinson," he said. "It's none of my business whether the guy you love has all of his marbles or not."

"You just don't understand Gene," she told him. "You're like his father. Gene has the soul of a poet."

Fancy grunted and changed the subject, not trusting himself to comment on Gene Robinson's poetic soul without starting the argument all over again.

"The witnesses at the trial have all been pulled into cover," he said. "There isn't a chance in the world of breaking open the Saunders killing again, so I'm trying something else."

"What?"

"You'll be better off not knowing. But the wheels are in motion. At least I think they are. I'm banking on Big Jim's having had my phone tapped. If he did, I expect to be neck deep in trouble by tomorrow at the latest. And I want to be left in it. Don't try to help me out by hiring lawyers or any such thing. Just sit tight and watch."

She frowned puzzledly. "Why, Dan? I'm not afraid. You said I could go along for the ride."

"The ride just ended. From here on all you could do is foul things up. Be a nice girl and stay away from me awhile, eh?"

"If that's what you want," she said slowly. "Is that all you asked me here for?"

"Not entirely. I was bored. There isn't a thing I can do until Big Jim makes the next move, and I figured I might as well kill time with a beautiful girl as on my back in a hotel room."

She made a face at him, but her facial muscles got out of control and reduced it to a grin.

From the cocktail lounge they moved into the dining room for lunch, where by tacit consent they kept conversation away from both Big Jim Calhoun and Gene Robinson. At twelve forty-five she left him to return to her beauty shop.

"Good luck, Dan," she said softly, put-

ting her small hand in his enormous one.

He grinned down at her. "Thanks. But I'm banking on a little more than just luck."

As he recrossed the lobby after escorting Adele to the street and putting her into a taxi, he was stopped by Billie, the bellhop.

"There's two plainclothes cops waiting in your room, Mr. Fancy," the boy whispered.

"Thanks, kid."

As he neared the door of 512, Dan began whistling. Making an unnecessary amount of noise when he inserted the key in his lock, he pushed open the door and stepped in. His eyes widened in simulated surprise when he saw the two men in the room.

Lieutenant Morgan Hart sat in the chair by the window with a snub-nosed thirty-eight leveled at Dan's stomach. The thin, sharp-nosed man who had tailed Dan to Larry Bull's house leaned negligently against the wall with both hands in his pockets.

"Drop your gun gentle, Fancy," Lieutenant Hart said quietly.

"Sure," Dan said.

Carefully he drew the weapon from under his arm, using only an index finger and thumb. With exaggerated daintiness he laid it on the carpet.

"This an arrest, or just a killing?" he asked.

"An arrest. But we'd be glad to make it a killing, if you want to resist."

"No thanks. What's the charge?"

"Homicide."

"Anyone I know?"

The thin lieutenant scowled at him. Rising, he dropped his Panama hat over his gun and urged the big man out of the room. At the doorway he stooped and pocketed Dan's .45 automatic. The hat-covered gun never varied from its bearing on the big man's nose as the trio rode down the elevator, crossed the lobby and entered a squad car at the curb. The skinny, sharp-nosed man drove, while Lieutenant Hart sat in the back with Dan.

"You don't really need that gun," Dan remarked. "I wouldn't make a break because I'm curious to find out your intentions."

The lieutenant said nothing, but he did not put away the gun. The grim manner in which he continued to eye Dan caused a tremor of uneasiness to run through the big man, for Morgan Hart's expression resembled nothing so much as that of a hired killer about to practise his profession. Fleetingly Dan wondered if perhaps he had misestimated Big Jim, and instead of being framed he was simply going to be murdered.

Then he decided that Big Jim would be guilty of nothing so crude, and settled back to await developments.

They were not long in coming. Swiftly the car drove toward the center of town. Near the hub of the shopping district it slowed to cruising speed and drifted with the traffic. Repeatedly the sharp-nosed driver glanced in the rear-view mirror, apparently awaiting some sign from the lieutenant. Finally, in the center of a block in which traffic whizzed in both directions and the sidewalks were crammed with pedestrians, Morgan Hart gave a slight nod.

Immediately the driver slammed on his brakes, and almost before the car stopped moving he had flung open the right-hand door and thrown himself to the sidewalk amidst startled pedestrians. Standing in a crouch, he drew a gun and fired over the top of the car.

Simultaneously Lieutenant Hart flung himself out of the back door and winged a bullet into the upholstery immediately beneath Dan.

Grasping the door handle on his own side, Dan threw his shoulder against the door and sprawled headlong into the street. Two more shots crashed, one nicking the asphalt on either side of the car.

Traffic from both directions screamed to a halt, leaving a wide path between Dan and the mouth of an alley across the street.

Like a harbor of safety the alley beckoned, but to reach it Dan would have to traverse a wide street while two men with pistols potted at his back. Even as he hit the street on all fours, his mind was racing, and he found time to be amazed at Big Jim's audacity. Picking the center of town with a hundred witnesses to stage a killed-while-escaping act was a stroke of genius, for even the governor would be impotent in the face of the testimony of so many disinterested witnesses.

That he would never make the mouth of the alley across the street was a certainty. With split-second decision he bounced erect, slammed shut the car door through which he had just tumbled, jerked open the driver's door and slid under the wheel.

Racing around either side of the car toward the point they expected to find Dan, and not expecting the maneuver, the two detectives were caught off balance. The motor was still running, and when Dan threw the car into low and gunned it, Morgan Hart was behind the car and the thin-nosed man was in front of it. The latter leaped backward in terror as the hood shot toward him, stumbled over the curb and fell flat. Then Dan was racing through a red light and was cut off from possible fire by the stream of traffic which immediately began to flow in the cross-street behind him.

DAN estimated he had at least five minutes before Lieutenant Hart could get a general alarm on the air, and he resolved to make the most of each minute. The shipping dock area along the lake front would be his best bet, he decided, for there he could probably find a cheap hotel which made a point of not asking its guests questions. Opening the siren wide, he headed in the general direction of the dock area at seventy-five miles an hour. At the same time he switched on the radio so that he would know the exact moment his squad car ceased to be a haven and became a target.

His guess was optimistic by two minutes. He had roared a little over three miles across town and was passing through what seemed to be a second-class residential district when the radio suddenly intoned: "Calling all cars. Calling all cars. Be on lookout for squad car number two seventy-six. Repeat car two seventy-six. Last seen at Fourth and Locust heading at high speed toward lake front. This car has been stolen by Daniel Fancy, who is wanted for murder. Fancy may have abandoned car and may now be on foot. He is six feet four inches, two hundred and seventy pounds, suntanned, has blue eyes and iron-gray hair. He is wearing a gray suit and no hat. This man is a cop-killer and may be armed. Take no chances with him."

That fixed him but good, Dan thought. Labeling him a cop-killer. Every cop in town, even the honest ones, if any, would now shoot first and call "halt" after Dan dropped. He cut his siren, slowed to a crawl and began looking for a parking place, so that he could proceed more inconspicuously on foot.

A quarter-block later he found it, a lone vacancy in front of a neighborhood tavern. Pulling alongside the car in front of the vacancy, he started to back in.

The rear end of his squad car was halfway in when another police car drifted from the side street immediately in front of him, crossed the intersection and stopped with a jerk. As it slammed into reverse, Dan gunned out of his parking place, whipped into a U-turn which made his tires scream in agony, and headed back the way he had come with the accelerator to the floor.

At the first corner he swung left at fifty-five miles an hour. A block farther on he made a dirt-track left turn by skidding around the corner sidewise at sixty. He was two blocks ahead and his speedometer needle wavered at eighty by the time the pursuing car rounded the second turn. When he reached ninety-two, his heart leaping to his throat every time a side street

flashed by, he had increased his lead to three blocks.

But by then the radio was chattering his location and sirens began to whine from all directions. Ahead he caught a flashing glimpse of the sun reflected on water, gritted his teeth and roared on. What he would do, or could do, when he reached the lake was something he had to decide within seconds.

Off to his left the screech of a siren grew to a crescendo. He caught a glimpse of a gray squad car flashing at him from a side street, its tires screaming as the horrified driver locked brakes to prevent crashing head-on into Dan's side. There was a sharp metallic click as a hub cap scraped his rear bumper, and in the rear-view mirror he could see the police car stalled diagonally across the street. A moment later another set of brakes squealed as the car which had originally given chase came to a frustrated stop, its way blocked by the stalled vehicle.

Dan realized his respite would amount only to seconds, however. He also realized the chase was nearly over, for a bare two blocks ahead he could make out the shipping dock, and there was nowhere left for him to go except into the lake. The distance shrank to a block before he made his decision.

Without slackening speed he flashed onto the wooden dock, slammed on his brakes fifty feet from its edge and skidded the rest of the way.

Considering he was driving an unfamiliar car, his timing was perfect. The squad car came almost to a full stop, maintaining just enough momentum to slide off the end of the pier in slow motion, loiter in the air for a fraction of a second and then drop vertically. During that fraction of a second Dan managed to shoulder open the door, part company with the squad car and enter the water in a shallow dive.

The car disappeared with an enormous splash. Underwater, Dan allowed himself to shoot forward until the force of his dive

was nearly spent, then twisted and with two powerful underwater strokes was under the dock. He continued swimming underwater until his lungs would no longer sustain him, then broke to the surface and held on to a piling while he gulped deep lungfull of air.

He found he was some twenty feet back under the dock. There was barely two-foot clearance between the underside of the dock and the water, he was gratified to discover. It would be impossible to get a boat underneath. Leisurely, he swam deeper under the pier until his feet touched bottom.

He could not have found a better hiding place had he deliberately hunted for one, he realized. He estimated that the dock was a hundred feet deep and possibly a block long. Even a dozen swimmers would have difficulty finding him, for the place was in perpetual dusk and there were literally hundreds of pilings to play hide-and-seek behind.

Apparently the police decided the same thing, for a few minutes later several boats crowded to the edge of the dock and powerful lights were beamed under it. But they contented themselves with peering from the boat and no swimmers ventured back to seek for him. Dan merely stood quietly behind a piling until the police gave up and went away.

Walking back into shallower water, he soon found his chest and shoulders above the surface, but his head scraping the underside of the dock. Sinking to a crouch, he continued back until he was able to sit on the hard sand bottom with his head and shoulders above water. He was not uncomfortable, for while the water was cool, it was clear lake water and probably clean enough to drink. However, he realized he might have to stay under the pier until dark, which was at least six hours off, and he would certainly grow uncomfortable if he had to stay immersed.

It occurred to him that if he crawled back far enough he might find a strip of dry sand where the pier joined the shore. Investi-

gating, he did find sand, though it could hardly be called dry. Lying sidewise, he was able to wedge himself almost entirely out of the water, so that it merely lapped against one arm and shoulder. He lay there until dark, and though he became cramped and chilled through, he was not nearly as uncomfortable as he would have been if he had been forced to remain seated in water for six hours.

At dark he swam to the edge of the pier a half block from the point where the squad car had sunk, listened five minutes for any sign of police patrol, then cautiously drew himself out of the water. Ten minutes later he was wringing out his wet clothes in a deserted warehouse. When he redressed he looked as if he had slept outside during a shower, but at least he did not squish when he walked.

He found a pay phone in a waterfront tavern where his appearance excited no comment, since all the customers looked as if they had slept in their clothes. Locating Adele Hudson's home phone number in the book, he dropped a nickel and dialed. She answered so promptly that he got the impression she had been waiting by the phone.

"Dan!" she breathed. "I've been worried to death ever since I heard it on the radio. Are you all right?"

"A little damp," he said huskily. "What was on the radio?"

"About your being arrested for murder, and escaping right in the heart of town and then drowning. I knew you didn't."

"Didn't what? Kill somebody or drown?"

"Either," she said breathlessly. "I had a feeling I'd hear from you, and I've been practically sitting on the phone."

"Who was I supposed to have killed?" he asked curiously. "Larry Bull?"

"Yes. You didn't, did you?"

"Not that I remember. But I have been expecting him to show up dead. When was I supposed to have done it?"

"Last night. A little after eight."

"Humm . . ." he said thoughtfully. "I

was at his house about then. No doubt Big Jim has witnesses to the shooting, ballistic tests to prove it was my gun and all the other necessary proof. Should make an interesting trial."

"What are you going to do, Dan?"

"Nothing. But you are. Get a pencil and paper. I want you to make a couple of long-distance calls for me."

CHAPTER FOUR

Tough Town Justice

DISTRICT Attorney Edward Ossening was a round, sleek man with a calm manner and horn-rimmed glasses which gave him the appearance of a benevolent owl. During the first few days after the murder of Homicide Detective Lawrence Bull, a series of secret conferences took place between Big Jim Calhoun and District Attorney Ossening. They were not very satisfactory conferences, and Big Jim's temper grew more ragged after each one. The D.A. managed to maintain his benevolent air, but beneath it his calmness disintegrated and his nerves became as ragged as Big Jim's temper.

The first conference took place the day after Dan Fancy, accompanied by Broadway columnist Henry Drew, turned himself in at the Lake City police headquarters.

"You said Fancy would never come up for trial," Ed Ossening complained nervously. "You said he'd be killed resisting arrest, or attempting to escape, and no one but the coroner would have to pass on the evidence against him."

"That was before Drew entered the picture," Big Jim snapped. "How the hell can I have him bumped when a nationally syndicated columnist sits outside his cell all day?"

"I don't understand how Drew got down here, or what his interest in it is."

"I do," Big Jim said grimly. "He flew down. He's a pal of Dan Fancy's, and

Fancy is using him as life insurance. But with the evidence we've got rigged, he'll need more than a newspaper columnist, to beat this rap."

The second conference took place the following afternoon.

"I don't like this lawyer, Farraday, who's defending Fancy," the D.A. said. "He's one of the top criminal lawyers in the country."

"It takes more than a legal rep to beat the kind of evidence you've got," Big Jim growled at him. "What's eating you?"

"He hadn't been in town ten minutes when he had a writ of habeas corpus," Ossening said nervously.

"So what? The hearing went all right, didn't it? Fancy's bound over for the grand jury without bail."

"That's what worries me. Farraday didn't didn't even ask for bail."

"Relax," Big Jim advised. "At least Fancy is where he can't make any trouble over the Saunders killing. In two more weeks young Robinson takes the final jolt, and Fancy won't even be up before the grand jury by then."

That same evening the third conference took place.

"Listen," Ed Ossening said plaintively. "I'm getting scared. Somebody's pulling strings."

"What now?" Big Jim inquired irritably.

"Fancy has been moved way up on the grand jury's calendar. He goes before it tomorrow morning."

Big Jim pulled a blank mask over the expression of surprise which started to grow on his face. "So what?" he asked with studied indifference.

"Well, we don't have any fix in with the grand jury, do we?"

"We don't need one," Big Jim said. "What can they do in the face of the evidence but remand him until trial?"

The fourth conference occurred the morning after the grand jury decided Fancy should be tried for first degree homicide.

"I thought somebody big was pulling strings in the Fancy case," Ed Ossening said breathlessly. "Circuit Judge Anderson has Fancy's trial scheduled to start *this afternoon!*"

"Well, you're ready, aren't you?" Big Jim asked irritably.

"Yes, of course. But who ever heard of such quick action in a murder case?"

"You lawyers make me sick," Big Jim told him. "You get all upset if there isn't a lot of legal delay. I read of a case in Alabama where a guy was arrested for murder, legally tried and hanged in twenty-four hours."

"This isn't Alabama," the D.A. muttered.

The fifth conference took place the evening of the first day of Dan Fancy's trial.

"I can't understand this lawyer, Farraday," Ed Ossening said worriedly. "He didn't challenge a single juror. Didn't even question them. Who ever heard of a jury in a murder trial being seated in one day?"

"You got the jury you wanted, didn't you?" Big Jim said. "I own every one of those guys. With that jury, you couldn't lose the case even without evidence."

"I'm scared," the district attorney said simply. "Let's withdraw charges."

"Are you crazy?" Big Jim roared. But his next words were a tacit admission that the same thought had at least occurred to him. "We can't withdraw charges without admitting the whole thing is a frame. Get in there and prosecute, or there'll be a new district attorney in this county next election."

"Yes, sir," said the D. A.

THE case of the People versus Daniel Fancy started out rather dully. The prosecutor, though a man of unquestioned legal ability, and seemingly in possession of an airtight case, did not have an inspiring courtroom manner. Though he presented a bland, unruffled visage to the jury, there was an indefinable air of unease surround-

ing him, and it seemed to increase as he paraded witness after witness before the jury. There was no obvious reason for his unease, for little by little he was weaving what appeared to be an indestructible case.

From the spectator's standpoint the defense contributed little more to the interest of the trial. The famous John Farraday, who most of the spectators had come to see in action, disappointed them by apparently going to sleep in his chair. His sharp chin rested upon his chest during the entire presentation of the state's case, and his eyes seemed to be closed. But periodic indication that he was conscious came each time Prosecuting Attorney Edward Ossening finished with a witness and Judge Anderson inquired if the defense wished to cross-examine. Then the theatrically long white hair of the famous lawyer would flutter briefly as his head gave an impatient shake, after which he again seemed to sink into a coma.

As the trial moved on, Judge Anderson's expression became more and more disapproving and his voice grew grimmer each time he asked the defense if it wished to cross-examine. Twice he brought the prosecution up short when the scope of Ed Ossening's questions went beyond the latitude the judge felt should be allowed in his court, and both times he glared at John Farraday, obviously feeling objection should have come from the defense.

During the entire trial the defendant slouched back in his chair, his fingers laced together across his lean stomach, and grinned a lopsided grin. Part of the time the grin was directed at Adele Hudson, who sat in the front row of the spectators' seats, and part of the time it was turned on the prosecuting attorney. It seemed to increase the unease of the latter.

As is usual in trials for murder, the first witness called by the prosecution was the arresting officer—in this case Lieutenant Morgan Hart. In a straightforward manner the lieutenant recounted that on the

evening of the fourteenth at about eight-thirty o'clock, a call had come into the Homicide Bureau from the fiancée of Detective Sergeant Lawrence Bull. The girl had been hysterical, but he gathered that Sergeant Bull was hurt.

Immediately he repaired to the home of Sergeant Bull at 1711 Fairview Avenue, the lieutenant continued, where he found the sergeant dead in his living room with a bullet hole in his back. On the basis of information furnished by the sergeant's fiancée, a Miss Ella Spodiak, he had located the cab driver who had brought the murderer to the scene of the crime, and through him traced the murderer to the Lakeview Hotel. It was the next day before he was able to accomplish the latter, however, and at about one P.M. he and a Detective Fleming had arrested the defendant in his hotel room. Lieutenant Hart went on to describe the defendant's daring break for freedom in the very center of town.

Ossening had the lieutenant examine a forty-five automatic and asked if he recognized it.

"Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Hart. "I took it from the defendant at the time of the arrest. I memorized the serial number so I could be sure of identifying it again."

The prosecution submitted the gun as exhibit A.

The second witness was Detective Fleming, who merely corroborated Lieutenant Hart's testimony of the arrest and subsequent escape of the defendant.

The next witness was the taxi driver who had driven Dan Fancy to the home of the deceased. He was a lean, shifty-eyed man who licked his lips frequently during the testimony. He stated that he had picked up the defendant in front of the Lakeview Hotel about eight P.M. on the fourteenth and had driven him to 1711 Fairview Avenue. He said the defendant was inside only a few minutes, at the end of which time he heard a sound like a shot. Immediately afterward the defendant rushed out of the house, jumped into the cab and ordered him to speed off. The driver said he took the defendant back to the Lakeview Hotel and did not see him again until he was asked to pick him out of a police lineup.

When Ed Ossening said, "Your witness," Judge Anderson frowned at John Farraday, obviously expecting him to ask why the driver had failed to report to the police the peculiar actions of his customer, and had waited for the police to come to him before he told his story. But when Farraday only gave his head a mild shake, the judge's lips drew into a thin line and he said to the witness, "That's all. You may step down."

The prosecution's key witness was Ella Spodiak, who described herself as the fiancée of the deceased. She turned out to be the well-built but stupid-looking blonde who had admitted Dan to Larry Bull's house. For her courtroom appearance she had discarded her red, tight-fitting dress in favor of a sedate black suit and a hat with a black veil. The effect of mourning was somewhat

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spoiled, however, by open-toed pumps which exposed toenails of flaming crimson.

She gave her testimony in a sullen singing, her eyes carefully averted from the grinning Dan Fancy. She told how she had been visiting Sergeant Bull on the evening of the murder, and had gone to open the door when the defendant rang the bell.

"He pushed right inside," she recited mechanically, wrinkling her brow in what might have been a continued effort to remember her lines. "He drew a gun and twisted my arm up behind my back and told me if I said a word, he'd shoot me. So I didn't say nothing—I mean anything. Then he asked if Larry was in the living room, and when I said yes, he pushed me ahead of him and made me open the door. Larry was watching television, and he jumped up when he saw Dan Fancy. 'Turn around', Fancy ordered him, 'and put up your hands.' And when Larry did, he shot him right in the back. Then he ran out of the house."

This time John Farraday's expression was pained when he shook his head.

The rest of the prosecution's witnesses were more or less routine. A medical examiner testified to the time of death, fixing it at approximately eight P.M. on the day of the fourteenth, and in medical terms declared that death had been caused by a bullet in the back. A ballistic expert said that the bullet removed from the body of Larry Bull matched a similar bullet fired from the gun taken from Dan Fancy. To clinch the matter the prosecution entered in evidence a pistol permit showing the gun belonged to Dan Fancy.

As the last witness stepped down, Ed Ossening discovered that due to lack of interference by the defense, the case he had planned to spend at least a week presenting had somehow gotten itself presented in four hours. But for some reason he was more frightened than reassured by the smoothness with which the trial had so far run.

He glanced uncertainly around, as though hoping to spy some witness he had inad-

vertently overlooked, then said in a voice higher than necessary, "The prosecution rests."

The judge glanced at his watch. "It is two P.M.," he announced. "If the defense has no objection, we will recess until ten A.M. tomorrow."

For the first time since the trial had started, John Farraday fully opened his eyes. "No objection, Your Honor," he said in a caressing voice which carried to every corner of the courtroom, though he spoke in a conversational tone.

AT TEN the next morning, after Judge Anderson had brought the court to order and inquired if the defense were ready, John Farraday rose slowly to his feet. He was a tall man, as thin and bony as Abraham Lincoln, but with a grace of body movement Lincoln lacked. He paused theatrically to sweep brilliant blue eyes over the packed courtroom, then said in his caressing voice, "The defense has but one witness, Your Honor. Will Adrian Fact please take the stand?"

From the back row rose a little insignificant-looking man in a worn seersucker suit. He advanced diffidently, raised his hand to be sworn, and kept his eyes lowered to his lap after he had taken the witness chair.

"Your name is Adrian Fact?" Farraday inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please look at the defendant and tell the court if you know him?"

Judge Anderson cleared his throat. "Your witness should be instructed to address his remarks to the jury rather than to the court, counselor."

Gracefully John Farraday turned to face the judge. "Your Honor, the defense has nothing to say to this jury, for there is little likelihood it will be asked to render a verdict. I asked the witness to address the court because I am sure after Your Honor has heard his testimony, you will

kick this case out of court so fast it will make the head of my esteemed colleague, the district attorney of this county, spin like a top."

Leaping to his feet, Ed Ossening squeaked, "I object!"

"To what?" asked the judge curiously.

"To—the insulting tone of counsel for defense. And to—" The prosecuting attorney hesitated, suddenly brightened and said in a stronger tone, "If the defense has evidence which the court might consider sufficient to dismiss this trial, it should have been introduced before the prosecution even presented its case. Before the jury was seated, for that matter. If there is such evidence, and I personally doubt it very much, the defense is criminally negligent in good citizenship, if nothing else, to allow the trial to proceed to this point before bringing it out."

Judge Anderson nodded. "A good point, counsellor." He turned to John Farraday. "You have anything to say to that?"

"If the court will be indulgent for a very few minutes," John Farraday said, "Mr. Fact's testimony will bring out why it was necessary for the defense to allow the prosecution to present its full case, even though a motion to dismiss based on the same testimony you are about to hear would undoubtedly have been granted before the trial started."

The judge frowned at the silver-haired lawyer. "I don't understand that statement, counsellor. And if this testimony you speak of is directed solely at the court, suppose I declare a recess and take it informally in my chamber?"

"That would be more proper procedure," Farraday admitted. "However, the defense has a particular reason for handling the matter in this way, and I beg the court's indulgence."

"Go ahead, then," the judge decided. "But I warn you, if it develops you have deliberately allowed this court to waste its time, not to mention the time of the jurors

and the witnesses involved, I will take a serious view of the matter."

Farraday nodded agreeably. "Now, Mr. Fact," he said, returning to the witness, "please look at the defendant and tell the court if you know him."

The little man glanced at Dan Fancy. "Yes, sir. I know him well."

"What is your relationship with the defendant?" the lawyer pursued.

"We're partners in the firm of Fact and Fancy, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's a private detective agency."

The silver-haired lawyer smiled at the prosecuting attorney. "Now, Mr. Fact, in your own words will you explain why you and the defendant are in Lake City?"

Ed Ossening was again on his feet. "I object, Your Honor. It is immaterial to this case why either the defendant or the witness are in Lake City."

"On the contrary, it is highly material," Farraday put in smoothly. "And even if it weren't, the prosecution has no right to object to data not directed to the jury. If Mr. Ossening is afraid the jury will be unduly prejudiced, he should ask the court to retire it until this matter is finished. But I assure both Your Honor and the prosecution it will make not the slightest difference to the outcome of this trial what the jury thinks. If the prosecution intends to continue objecting every time I ask a question, I will request Your Honor to reconsider his own suggestion and receive the witness' testimony in the privacy of his chamber. However, I sincerely feel that it is in the public interest and to the interest of justice that the prosecution and the spectators in the courtroom hear what the witness has to say."

"This is a highly irregular procedure," said the judge, "and I am not sure I shouldn't take your witness' testimony privately. However, in view of the peculiar manner in which this case has so far progressed, I am not inclined to stifle the first evidence of interest counsel for the defense

has shown in the trial." He glared at the prosecuting attorney. "If there are further interruptions from the prosecution, I will recess court and take this evidence privately. If you want to hear it, please keep that in mind."

Ed Ossening opened his mouth, closed it again and sat down.

John Farraday said to the witness, "Please explain to the court why you and the defendant are in Lake City."

"We were on a job," the little man said. "Martin Robinson, the father of Eugene Robinson, who awhile back was sentenced to death in this same court for the murder of a man named Saunders, hired us to prove his son had been framed."

"How did you decide to approach this case?"

"Well, from what old Mr. Robinson told us about the trial, we were convinced from the beginning that one of two things was true. The evidence against Eugene Robinson was so complete, either he actually was guilty, or the trial was crooked. We decided to work on the assumption that the trial was crooked."

Ed Ossening jumped to his feet, but sat down again when the judge glared at him.

"Mr. Fact," Judge Anderson interrupted in a cold voice, "the case you refer to was tried in this court. Unless you clarify that last statement immediately, you will find yourself held in contempt."

"I didn't mean the court was crooked," Adrian Fact said calmly. "The governor of this state is a personal pal of Martin Robinson, and the old man had him check up on you. He was quite satisfied with your integrity." Undisturbed by His Honor's speechless glare, the little man went on, "I meant we decided all eleven witnesses and the two police officers involved perjured themselves."

This time the prosecuting attorney jumped to his feet and remained there, silent but quivering.

"That's a pretty serious charge," Judge

Anderson said after pounding down the sudden hum in the courtroom. "For your own sake, I hope you can substantiate it."

"I can't directly," the little man admitted. "But I can prove it's a likely situation in any trial prosecuted by District Attorney Ed Ossening. I can prove all the witnesses in *this* trial perjured themselves."

CHAPTER FIVE

"Good Hunting, Mr. Fancy!"

FOLLOWING a deathly silence, an excited hum rose over the audience. Judge Anderson rapped for order.

John Farraday, who had quietly stepped to one side while the judge was asking questions, interposed himself again.

"Mr. Fact, will you describe the exact procedure you and the defendant took in your investigation of the Robinson trial?"

"Sure," the little man said agreeably. "We reasoned that in a local setup tight enough to run a frame like the one worked on the Robinson kid, we wouldn't have the chance of a snowball—we wouldn't have much chance to uncover evidence that it had been a frame. At the same time, there was a good chance the same crowd that framed Robinson would work a similar frame on us if we stepped on their toes."

"Then Fancy got the idea of coming down here and deliberately throwing his weight around until the local crowd got tired of him and framed him. He figured if he could publicly expose this bunch in the middle of a frame, it would force an impartial reinvestigation of the Robinson case. He had me tail him and keep track of every move he made." He added modestly, "I'm pretty good at tailing people, because hardly anybody notices me."

"I planted a mike in Dan's room and recorded every conversation that took place there. I'd be glad to play these off for Your Honor. Particularly the one where a local man known as Big Jim Calhoun bragged

about the way he controlled this town, and what would happen to Dan Fancy if he didn't drop his investigation of the Saunders murder. I also took a lot of pictures with a chest camera, which I would like Your Honor to examine."

He paused to separate his shirt front slightly and expose the lens of a flat camera strapped to his chest.

Judge Anderson said, "You have made some amazing statements, Mr. Fact. But so far I detect no proof that the defendant was framed for the murder of Sergeant Bull."

"I'm coming to it," the little man assured him. "On the evening of the fourteenth, Dan Fancy visited Larry Bull about eight o'clock, just as various witnesses testified. I know, because I followed him. Or rather I followed the taxi which followed Dan's, for he was tailed there and back by Detective Gyp Fleming, one of the officers who later arrested him.

"But from that point on, all the witnesses' testimony departs from the facts. No shot sounded inside the house. I happened to be watching through the window the whole time Dan Fancy and Larry Bull talked, and Bull was still alive when he left. When Fancy came out, he was walking, not running as that taxi driver said.

"When Dan got back to his room at the Lakeview, he phoned our client long-distance and told him one of the arresting officers in the Saunders murder was willing to talk for five thousand bucks. I knew Fancy's phone was tapped by the local mob, because I had it tapped too, and I could always hear a second click after Fancy hung up. I figured Fancy's conversation with our client meant a death sentence for Larry Bull, because the local mob would figure Bull was selling out. I also figured Fancy would be framed for the killing. So I dropped Dan fast and scooted back to Larry Bull's house to keep an eye on him."

Adrian Fact paused for breath. "This is where the proof comes in that every witness in this trial is a perjurer. Bull was sup-

posed to have been killed around eight P.M. on the fourteenth. But at nine P.M. that evening he left his house with Lieutenant Morgan Hart, who took him to the Downtown Athletic Club, the headquarters of Big Jim Calhoun. Bull was inside with Hart not more than ten minutes, then came out alone and returned home. At midnight he was sitting in his front room watching television when Morgan Hart came back and shot him with a snub-nosed thirty-eight revolver. I've got a picture of the shooting."

Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. The crowd shouted, news cameras flashed, and the district attorney began objecting at the top of his voice. Judge Anderson pounded until there was a momentary hush.

Taking advantage of the silent interval, the little man finished calmly, "That makes a liar of everybody, including the medical examiner who said Bull had been dead since eight P.M. and the ballistic expert who said he was killed by Dan Fancy's forty-five."

Disorder broke out again, and this time the judge's gavel could not quench it. A half dozen news men broke for the door, but slid to a halt in unison when Lieutenant Morgan Hart suddenly barred the way with a snub-nosed thirty-eight revolver.

"The first person who makes a move," he said distinctly over the sudden hush, "gets a soft-nosed bullet right in the gizzard!"

Stepping to the lieutenant's side, Detective Gyp Fleming emphasized the threat with his own gun. Simultaneously other gunmen rose from the crowd and covered the spectators with guns.

Quietly the door at the rear of the room opened and the neat gray arms of two state troopers passed under the chins of Morgan Hart and Gyp Fleming from behind. In unison the troopers' free hands clamped over the gunmen's wrists, forcing the two pistols to point harmlessly in the air. In the wake of the first two, a dozen gray-uni-

formed men armed with riot guns filed into the court and lined up along the rear wall.

In a resonant voice the trooper with a strangle hold on Morgan Hart called, "Any other local gunnies who feel tough can step right up. You've got two seconds to drop your guns on the floor or get a load of buckshot."

There was a clatter as a half dozen pistols fell to the floor.

"Carry on, Your Honor," the spokesman for the state police called cheerfully.

But for the moment his honor was beyond carrying on, being occupied with gaping like a fish at the riot guns of the men in gray.

Quietly Dan Fancy left his seat, picked up "Exhibit A" and seated the full clip lying next to it. Working the slide once to throw a shell in the chamber, he dropped the hammer to quartercock and stuffed the gun in his pocket. He nodded to the judge, who politely nodded back without seeing him, grinned at Adrian Fact and John Faraday, and winked at Adele Hudson as he strolled toward the door.

The trooper holding Morgan Hart pulled both himself and the lieutenant aside from the exit and said, "Good hunting, Mr. Fancy."

"Thanks," Dan said as he passed out of the courtroom.

AS DAN expected, the news of the crash of Big Jim Calhoun's empire had not yet penetrated to the Downtown Athletic Club. The arrival of the state police at the courthouse had effectively blocked any envoys to Big Jim from there. When he entered the barroom on the first floor, Dan found it deserted except for the bartender and the baldheaded Stub, who were quietly playing gin rummy.

The big man came in so suddenly that the gunman, Stub, barely had time to swing around on his bar stool and shoot one hand toward his shoulder when Dan was upon him. Grasping the burly man by both

biceps, he lifted him bodily, and discouraged the bartender's reach for a billy club by tossing Stub over the counter on top of him. Both men disappeared behind the bar in a crash of bottles and glasses.

Placing one hand on the surface of the counter, Dan lightly vaulted over, grabbed the bald gunman by the seat of the pants and the collar, and heaved him headfirst back to the customers' side of the bar again. Stub traversed a short distance on his face, but stopped suddenly when his head, in co-operation with an iron chair leg, acted as a brake.

Satisfied that one antagonist was safely out of the fight, Dan turned his attention to the bartender, who alone hardly constituted competition, being a consumptive-looking man in his fifties who weighed approximately a hundred and thirty-five pounds.

Jerking the man erect by the shirt front and holding him at arm's length with one hand, so that the bartender's feet were six inches clear of the floor, Dan shook him gently.

"Where is Big Jim?" he asked in a husky voice.

The man's eyes rolled upward and he said in a strangled tone, "Upstairs. Second floor."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir," the bartender whispered.

The big man gave him another gentle shake. "You wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"Hell, no!" the barkeep said, literally horrified by the suggestion.

Satisfied that the man was too frightened to do anything but cooperate, Dan suddenly released his grip. The bartender's feet hit the floor with a jolt which caused him to stagger against the back bar and add another bottle to the whiskey-reeling litter of broken glass on the floor. He regained his balance by embracing the cash register.

"How do you get up there?" Dan asked mildly.

The bartender stumbled all over his own

feet in his eagerness to demonstrate the floor button which operated the door's electric lock. Vaulting the bar again as gracefully as a cat, the big man waited for the buzz, then pushed open the door next to the bar.

"By the way," he said before passing all the way through. "When your bald-headed friend wakes up, tell him to sit down and relax. The joint is surrounded by state cops."

Which was not exactly a lie, Dan thought, for the troopers would be on their way as soon as they wound up their duties at the courthouse, and by the time Baldy regained consciousness, the place probably would be surrounded.

Following the short hallway to the elevator, Dan entered the open door and pushed the button marked 2. As the car rose, he drew his automatic and raised the hammer to full-cock.

The bartender had not mentioned the extra steel-grilled door which disclosed itself to Dan when the elevator door slid back, an oversight Dan attributed to his own hurried questioning rather than to the man's lack of cooperation. He recognized it for what it was even before Big Jim recognized his visitor, however, and had his gun aimed through the steel latticework, the barrel steadied on one of the crossbars, before Jim could even begin to reach for a desk drawer.

"If you so much as wriggle a finger, I'll blow off the top of your head," Dan said with husky relish. "How do you work this contraption?"

The cherubic face of the giant behind the desk was an expressionless mask. "It's an electric lock," he said tonelessly. "The buzzer's under my desk."

"Then you can move one foot," Dan commanded. "But move it slow."

Through the open desk well he could see both of Big Jim's legs, and he watched critically as the giant's right foot cautiously slid forward under the desk. Then a buzz

sounded, and a jolt of electricity passed from the steel door through Dan's gun, hurling him back against the rear wall of the car. The automatic fell to the floor outside the elevator.

Groggily Dan picked himself up as the steel door swung open and Big Jim beckoned him in with his own gun.

"You have to wait until after the buzz before you touch it," the giant said with a grin. "Otherwise you get one hundred and ten volts. I had it designed particularly to cover situations like this."

Dan watched the steel door clang shut again, then turned to face Big Jim.

"The gun isn't going to do you much good," he said mildly. "Your frame blew up in your face, and the building is surrounded by state cops."

"I hope," he added mentally.

Big Jim's grin did not falter. Backing to the window, he cast a quick glance over his shoulder. Then his eyes returned to Dan's.

"How did you manage it, Dan?"

Apparently the building *was* now surrounded.

Big Jim's grin had faded to a moody expression. "Did you do a thorough job, Dan? Have you really got me licked?"

"You won't be able to wriggle out, Jim."

The giant nodded, accepting Dan's estimate as the truth. "How bad is it? For me personally, I mean."

"Well," Dan said consideringly, "all your pet witnesses are going up for perjury. Morgan Hart is going to the chair for the murder of Larry Bull. You know how rats begin to squeal when they're cornered. They'll all shift as much as they can on to you. Only you know how much that is."

The giant thought a moment. "Ten years maybe. Twenty at the outside. I haven't personally killed anybody."

"Going to start now?" Dan asked.

Big Jim glanced down at the gun. "Possibly. You meant to get me, didn't you?"

Dan shook his head. "Not that way. I meant to make sure you weren't armed, then

finish the slugging match we started in my hotel room."

Big Jim examined him curiously. "You're a persistent guy, Dan. You've tried to take me at least ten times since the first time I beat hell out of you twenty-five years ago. And all it ever got you was more bumps."

Stepping behind his desk, Big Jim dropped the gun in a drawer, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"All right, sucker," he said, grinning at Dan. "Come get your bumps."

DURING the short part of a minute between Dan's last remark to the bartender and the actual arrival of the state police, the bartender took off like a jet-propelled plane, leaving Stub still unconscious. Consequently when the troopers arrived, trailed by Adrian Fact and Adele Hudson, they found no one to explain the combination of the knobless door next to the bar. A husky trooper was just preparing to solve the combination with an axe, when the door opened from inside and Dan Fancy staggered out.

Dan's coat was gone and the whole left side of his shirt hung from his belt in shreds, exposing half his hairy chest and one naked arm. One of his trouser legs was ripped from cuff to hip, and flopped open to disclose blood welling from a perfect set of teeth marks in the fleshy part of his calf. His left eye was tightly closed and the other was slowly swelling shut. Blood from both nostrils dribbled across his mouth and seeped from the end of his chin.

Supporting himself with one hand against the door jamb, he focused his remaining eye blearily on Adrian Fact and opened the other hand to exhibit a large yellow molar, obviously not his own.

"I finally grew up to the big bum," he said in groggy triumph.

Then he pitched forward on his face. . . .

Martin Robinson stood stiff and straight as his son approached the group waiting for him at the prison gate, but something yearn-

ing in the old man's expression told Dan he would bow right down to the ground for a smile from his son.

Eugene Robinson glanced without interest at Adrian Fact, swept his gaze curiously over Dan Fancy's bruised features, then flashed his dazzling smile as he took both Adele Hudson's hands and gave them a light squeeze. Apparently he considered it too public a place to exhibit more affection.

Last of all the young man turned to his father. "Hello, Dad," he said tonelessly.

The old man winced. "Are you ready to come home now, Gene?" he asked.

In a careless tone Gene said, "I rather thought I'd get married instead."

Martin Robinson smiled eagerly. "Your wife will always be as welcome as you are, son."

Watching, Dan Fancy's stomach sickened in sympathy for the lonely old man. He turned to Adrian Fact.

"Mr. Robinson's check clear through yet, Ade?"

The little man glanced at him in surprise and nodded. Dan directed his next question to Adele Hudson.

"You don't think it would be unfair to take advantage of a young man who *wasn't* in death row, do you, Adele?"

Puzzled, she asked, "What do you mean?"

"Just this."

Raising one large palm, he covered the face of Eugene Robinson with it and pushed. The young man staggered backward, tripped over a hedge and sat in the dust with a thump. Swinging Adele up in his arms like a baby, Dan strode toward the taxi which had brought him and Adrian to the prison.

"What I want with a woman stupid enough to fall for a twerp like that is beyond me," he growled. "But maybe eventually I can train some sense into your head."

He stopped to begin the training.

"Dan!" she squealed. "Kissing in public! What will Eugene think?" ■ ■ ■

By Aali
Alexander



THE THOUSANDTH MAN

*Could Mr. Bibb really read the
crime on the blank, moonlit win-
dows—the promise of violence in
the leaning ladder?*

THERE are certain facts not altogether usual, in the matter of Mr. Bibb. A little lone man boiling his own tea and looking for ways to fill out the solitude; now that he had concluded the years spent at making entries in other men's ledgers and carrying forward bal-

ances so many times to succeeding years.

The suburb where he settled down was the usual sort. Both its rich and its strugglers had their ambitions. Some hungered for treasures, and some for high places, either peaks or princesses.

But Mr. Bibb had been nurtured on legend. This may be better than balances, though it is not yet proven. In spite of wearing spectacles, he was a simple man. And he had long been dazzled, for example, by policemen in the splendor of their horses and their buttons. He came to the belief that for every man, at any age, there is a duty.

It took a bit of bracing, but he did the needful, and the day arrived when he sat at the kitchen table of his little house, a happy man, holding his badge and identity card as a Civil Defense warden and eager as a boy with a new gold tooth.

The possibilities of it all sparkled before him. What better way to begin than with a round of visits to everyone in his district? There is no pleasure like curiosity lawfully satisfied.

In due course he found himself, one summer evening, in a shadowed lane, calling at the leak-stained, solitary little house of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Freel.

Now, Mr. Bibb had his ideas on the married state, and to him it was like the meeting of woolens and water: what would stretch would stretch, and what would shrink would shrink, and the thin spots showed where they were least wanted. He could recognize at once that Mrs. Freel, after ten years of it, was not the gentlest of wives, nor her husband the best of men. Nevertheless that could challenge us all.

But whatever possessed these two, with their disturbing faces and side-looking eyes, was far beyond such mentionable comforts as fretting or loving. And when Mr. Bibb sensed also that money came into their household like a rich relation and lingered as briefly, it disturbed him altogether from the business at hand.

He tried, as best he could, to resist the forceful twist of his intuition, and chatted manfully away, but presently it was all silence; for talk of great things is not easy to come by, and of small ones is soon gone. And the puzzle of their purpose might well diddle curiosity even beyond that of a Mr. Bibb. He thought of things he could not name; and felt foolish and looked it; and rose to go, nor was he asked to come again. And as he walked away, the moonlight on the little stucco house of the Freels was not like other moonlight which he knew; nor was the ladder which leaned between the upper windows like an ascent for simple men.

Could you have imagined that a few days later you might have seen a sad woman weeping on his shoulder, and all in the noonday too. Not Mrs. Freel; by no means. And a young one, pretty and rich, and with all the pleasant geegaws to make her gay. This was Mrs. Timothy Borse, and she lived in one of the biggest houses in the valley, and you would have been pleased to see how kindly she welcomed Mr. Bibb and told him, without being asked, that her husband would be glad to give blood to the Red Cross again, if they would have him. And then she listened, sharp as a frightened bird, and ran out of the room, and came back with her baby in her arms, and trembled, and shed tears.

"I must tell someone, I must. You are a warden, I can tell you, if you will keep it secret. I am forbidden to tell anyone, even my husband or the police! My baby's life is threatened! He will die if I do not do as they tell me! I am afraid ever to leave him out of my sight."

Mr. Bibb sat up very straight and asked for facts.

"It was the telephone call. A week ago. I think it was a woman. And I have no way of knowing if someone will poison him, or carry him away, or smother him, but I must do as they say."

Still Mr. Bibb demanded facts, and felt

his chest glitter now with invisible buttons.

"It is a strange kind of thing. I am to get ten thousand dollars, which is not too hard for me to do; I have my own money."

Mr. Bibb nodded. He had heard of how rich Mrs. Bibb's father was; and of how her husband had been a hero home from far-off wars, where he had left an arm; and then an employee in the Borse factory, where his talent and tenacity, like two sure feet, had carried him up the rungs to all of this.

Still, any ladder has a way about it: see how it can be a bridge between a pillow of stones and the gate of heaven, as it was in the vision of Jacob the patriarch; or a target for winds and loneliness; or the last climb to the hug of the hangman.

"And then I am to send the ten thousand dollars in old money and in an unmarked and anonymous package, to the office the Red Cross has just opened here in the village. And I am to put in an unsigned printed note that the money is to be given secretly to the thousandth person who donates blood. And it is to be kept secret by the Red Cross from the newspapers, from everyone."

Mr. Bibb was now sitting up straight indeed. This was a strange business.

Mrs. Borse held her baby very tightly. It was such a pretty baby; not too fat, like the gluttonous lump of humanity that shows in horrid caricature the greed of life to stay alive; nor too thin, like the cruel reminder of how inconstant that hold is. But this baby was full of romps and twinkles and the sweet smell of love, unmarked by threat or memory or the ache of bravery and burden. Mr. Bibb gave it a finger to hold and said to it boldly, "I'll protect you, my pretty. You stay here and be happy. I'll see you do."

"But how? And how will I know when the thousandth person has donated blood? Or what will happen after that? And surely it can never be that the Red Cross could ever be part of such a plot."

"Not in a thousand years! At least not if they knew it was a plot. Leave everything to me. And as soon as I have any news, I will tell you. We'll catch them, sure as my name is Bibb. Be brave now."

He went away feeling very gallant, and settling his spectacles with a slap to help steady his ideas. But outside the house he knew his talk was only the snore of a sleeping dog unchallenged in its dream. All he could invent was the notion to go himself and donate blood. Needful though it was, he had not once thought of doing it sooner. He was a simple man, so I ask you to excuse him, since the rest of the world is wiser. But he stopped on the way home and as a preparation bought for his supper a bit of liver; he had heard it builds the blood.

Next day he lay on the Red Cross table, opening and closing his fist as instructed. He watched his blood flow into the bottle. The fist became a pulse between a wish and an anger. Why, *he* was a part of the plot now at work! How alone he felt.

And there were so few who came to give. And if they gave, they also were part of the plot! Oh, he was the man distracted with a righteous rage.

And then what a surprise to see the volunteer worker who sat by the open exit door.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Mrs. Freel."

She gave him his blood-donor's button; she wrote a number in a book.

For such as Mr. Bibb, the bold moment met is the brave moment ended: he was the bold-faced man no more.

Yet when he saw that the clerk in the shabby hardware store next door was Mr. Freel, he lingered. And was it not a puzzler, for Mr. Freel, a brawny man, to slip along like a hiding squirrel and say slyly to Mrs. Freel, "How do we stand?" and when she said as slyly, "Slow today, far from ready," to slip back to his sieves and saucepans.

These were odd words, and comfortable doings are built not on odd words but even ones. So Mr. Bibb told himself that he had become a man of duty, with a badge and a mission, and he looked hard for some wisp of courage. He called to mind that in older days blood-giving strengthened the soul. But he could not find his soul, and his knees wobbled. So he waited in an alley until Mr. Freel met Mrs. Freel in a drug-store booth for lunch, and then he listened in the next booth. And what Mrs. Freel said to Mr. Freel would not have been clear to anyone else, but it made his very stomach shudder.

No doubt it was very wrong of Mr. Bibb. I do not condone him. I mention only that he had not liked their faces at the start. If that is not enough reason, is there a better? What about the faces which you remember or marry or fight? What face is the one you love?

LET us return to Mr. Bibb, who sat making himself sick with food and fear; since he now was sure that he had sniffed out the plotters from whom he had to save the Borse baby, the ten thousand dollars, and the Red Cross. Nor did he dare to call on anyone for help; for since he could not guess how much was bluff and how much truth, all must be done by him alone. This comes of admiring policemen's buttons, until the doomed duty takes its toll, as it was doing now.

He lay low in his little kitchen, boiling tea, and thought of villainies he had read; little Charley Ross carried off in the wagon and never seen again; the Lindbergh baby spirited down a ladder and found a dead shell.

Oh, he was shaky as ever a man could be, thinking and thinking in his quiet house. And he wished he had never chosen to be other than a hermit.

But there might yet be a scheme, a scheme of a sort.

See Mr. Bibb, now, day after day. Hur-

rying from house to house; from street to lane, from fire-house to police-station. Pleading, exhorting, cajoling, haranguing. See him, night after night, reminding the delayers and the dickerers, the hesitant and the hold-outs, the promisers and the possibiles, to become blood-donors.

He kept a list, to give himself some hit-or-miss guess on the climb to the goal of his fears. For he dared not risk letting anyone know what it was he wanted.

And sometimes, going home in the deep midnight, he would turn aside and walk past the house of the Freels, looking at the ladder which waited against the wall till the leaks in the roof should be skinned over. For company he would breathe into his warden's whistle, soft as a drowsy chirper; and it was truly a pluck to his heartstrings the first time a huge policeman responded to the signal. That was a strengthening to Mr. Bibb, and thereafter they had a ritual of it.

Now the raws of autumn were darkening, and every day he counted shivering the numbers on his list.

For all he knew, he was still on a ledge of safety; but the more donors he sent, the narrower the margin to the fatal edge; to say nothing of those who came of themselves. And when No. 1000 was due—

He shook with the fear of it. How would he dare it at the end? Mr. Freel looked so like an ogre, and Mrs. Freel so like an ogre's wife. And in this world so often what you look like is what you are; or at least what you are, you come to look like.

And then one day, when he was watching from the shadows as he now did every day, he saw Mrs. Freel signal Mr. Freel, and she held up three fingers. For the moment the blood-donors' bench was empty. A new idea pinched Mr. Bibb. Suppose they had planned that Mrs. Freel should be No. 1000. But even the Red Cross officials would question that. It had to be Mr. Freel.

The clock was dragging one tired leg after the other toward closing time. Mr. Bibb stood there, and he wished he were back again in the time where he too was a numeral, a clocked hand pushing a pen. But no man borrows his past, and there he was, a warden; with his hand hung with a whistle. For the puny comfort of it, he breathed into its throat.

Sing of larks if you like, sing of nightingales; make your rhymes and rhythms of the robins and the thrushes. But what lark, what thrush, ever piped into a terror-tightened twilight and brought around the corner two blue-clad policemen six feet high, touching their brims at Mr. Bibb and giving him the time of day?

The daring of it! And with never a swallow of tea to do it on! He took each of them by an elbow, he hustled them before him past the eyes of Mrs. Freel and only a moment ahead of Mr. Freel's staying hand, and in less time than it takes to tell, the three of them in proper sequence were on the tables, the bottles swinging near their heads and the rhythm of the three fists a silent music in his eyes.

O'Leary : 998.

McMahoney : 999.

Mr. Bibb : 1000.

There he was, led by the branch chief past the gauntlet of Mr. Freel's scowl and Mrs. Freel's silence, in the private office with the money in his hand, and a neat packet it was: and all dispatched that quickly and easily that he could hardly believe. O'Leary and McMahononey were his guard of honor to walk him away. Oh, the world reeled a bit around his head as he met the outer air.

But it was his ears alone that had listened to hear Mrs. Freel say to Mr. Freel, "Then tonight you'll take the baby." And her further words, "If you cross *this* up, this time for sure I'll kill you."

He longed to go home and boil his kettle, but it was to Mrs. Borse he went, alone, with the money and the warning, and saw her gather together her husband and her baby and flee away all in a moment. All of that should have been enough for any man.

But by now Mr. Bibb had dashed his feet against adventure, and it draws like a quicksand. An armchair is not easy to win back to. He went out, trembling, at the thieves' hour, and hid himself in the Freels' lane.

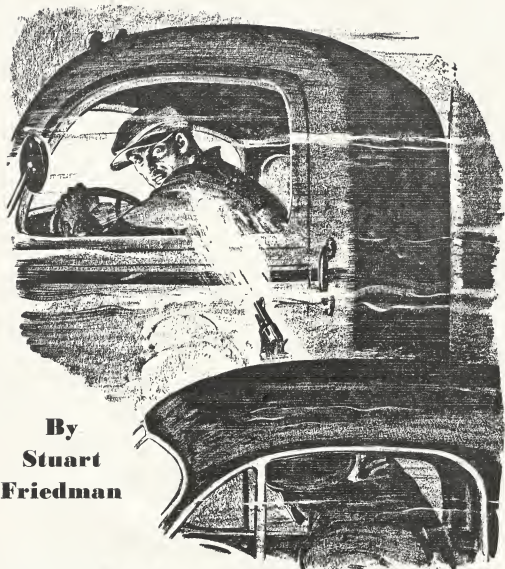
The waiting was not for long, but it would chill you. He saw Mr. Freel come back, a man bilked of his crime, with rage smoking about him in the night.

As Mr. Bibb shrank away and watched, Mr. Freel rearranged his ladder. It was thus no longer a climb to the roof: instead, it tacked upward to the open window of the dark bedroom; a lonely shadow on the covering wall, a way without turning, a forward thrust to destiny. Mr. Freel climbed it and entered the window. Mr. Bibb waited till he heard a single scream, strangled in a moment. Mr. Freel had very large hands.

Then Mr. Bibb darted out and laid the ladder flat on the ground, and softly blew his warden's whistle. The answering policeman saw Mr. Freel's outcoming foot searching vainly over the sill. No imaginary stranger would be the ghost for any of this business. The meeting of Mr. Freel and the policeman held a promise far beyond the moment.

But Mr. Bibb hurried away. He was exhausted with so much bravery. All he craved was the locked door and himself behind it, and the kettle humming to the quiet room the old, old tale of make the choice and pay the price. You can see he was at heart neither brave nor dutiful, but much like you and me. ■ ■ ■

**GIVE THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL—
CALL YOUR LOCAL BLOOD BANK TODAY!**



By
Stuart
Friedman

NIGHT STOP

*Now that Jack knew about the load
he was driving, he also knew that
—take it or leave it—it was a cargo
— of death. . . .*

*He was driving right alongside,
shooting fast. . . .*

AT TWO o'clock, I was rolling the thirty-ton rig at sixty when I saw the orange neon Cleary Truck Stop sign glowing through the night a mile ahead. After ten hours at the wheel I was beat and the diesel's 245-horsepower was beginning to sound and feel like 245 fighting stallions in a corral with one mare. Cleary's should have looked good to eyes

that felt like they'd just come out of a sand bath. But last time I'd made this run I'd been blowing my horn like a hero about buying my own rig. I didn't want to explain why I was driving for Spartan. I'd highball past. I'd grab shuteye in the bunk behind the seat; fuel myself and the diesel in spots where over-the-road drivers didn't go.

Then I thought about the big friendly lounge, clean bunks and showers, the Cleary steaks and pies. And the coffee that's brewed with a special feel for the night and the drivers on the long, long roads. I sighed and began to stairstep my speed down through the eight half-gears and four full-gears. A truck stop is like home, where you can hold up your head whether you've flopped or not.

A rig moved at a roaring crawl out to the road as I tooled in among thirty silent giants and parked. I checked temperature, air and oil pressures, then climbed down from the cab with a flash and jack handle. I circuited the eighteen-wheeler, slugged the tires, listening for the rotten-pumpkin sound of a flat. The lungs were solid. The flash didn't show up any damage under the big semi. And none of the bulbs in the carnival of yellow, amber, red and white lights was blinked. I got back in the cab, cut running lights and ignition and penned *Cleary Truck Stop* on the circular tachograph chart. The silent stool pigeon had to know everything. The tach was on duty every mile of a trip, squealing if you rolled above sixty or the motor turned more than 1800 r.p.m.

The cowboy days of throwing out the gears on a long, empty, straightaway hill and shooting for hell at a hundred were gone. The tach was there to report it if you weren't geared-in every foot of the way. I wore a safety button in my cap but I thought sourly that if things got any more respectable I'd lose my self-respect.

I got my suitcase and walked groggily back to the Cleary bunk-and-shower rooms.

My body wanted to collapse but my nerves were too souped up and my gut was hollow. I washed, went up to the main building and entered the lounge.

The *cluck-cluck-cluck* of a scoring pinball machine mixed sounds with violins and a blues-singing girl from the rainbow-light-ed juke box and the yakkety-yak of twenty wound-up drivers. When long-haul drivers stop they're like unwheeled trucks with the motors left running.

"Jack Metz!" somebody yelled at me. "Where you been, you ugly son?"

By the time I'd got past the bulletin board where dispatchers' messages were posted, I had a gallery of old buddies. I started feeling sharp and fresh. They wanted to know what I was doing in a Spartan instead of a Five-Star rig and what had happened to the pipe dream of driving for myself.

"Could I write a book!" I laughed, shaking my head. "Man, are you mugs lucky to be shiftless and no-account. Take it from me, stay worthless bums like you are. Don't get ambition!"

"That's real inspirational, Jack," Tim Offens said. "While you deliver your lecture, we'll have coffee . . . on you."

Half a dozen of us took seats around the curve of the horseshoe counter. Sally, the imp-faced little brunette waitress, brought menus. She's a born trucker's girl and we kicked it around with her. It was light and easy and nice. Her steady was another driver and nobody poached. The others decided to have pie with their coffees since it was on me and I ordered steak and trimmings.

"Give, Jack."

I lighted a smoke, shook my head. "I don't want to talk about it."

"We know," Tim mocked. He said in an undertone to the others, "We're in for a siege. He won't spare us one damn detail!"

"Really, Tim. I'd rather not."

"Aw, purty please, Jack. Just think of us as Mother."

I talked. I bit my tongue and spared them a detail here and there. I'm a driver who hasn't had a collision in a quarter-million miles, so it was a cinch steering clear of a big institution like matrimony. And out of the five- to six-hundred, including subsistence allowances I drew monthly, I could save a hundred. The stake built up to six thousand.

The tractor-trailer outfit I wanted to call home ran fourteen thousand. The bank was ready to finance me. On days off, I lined up shippers till I was sure of all the freight I could haul. I hired a lawyer licensed to practice before the Interstate Commerce Commission. A CPA prepared a financial statement and set up a system of records and accounts. We thrashed out operating problems, tariffs, rates, costs. We were set to prove to the ICC that I was fit, willing and able to operate as a common carrier in interstate commerce.

The tough thing was to get what's called a certificate of public convenience and necessity from ICC. So, at the hearing before the district examiner I had four shippers to testify for me. They said there weren't enough existing facilities to meet their needs and therefore another trucker was a public necessity.

But the other trucking companies had a right to oppose any application. Two of them, including Five-Star, the outfit I was then working for, were at the hearing. They showed that they were each adding two trucks to their fleets and could handle all shipping needs. No new outfit was needed. My application was turned down.

"None of the shippers I'd lined up were Five-Star customers," I said, finishing. "They were mostly men I'd known since the Army. They'd been getting lousy service and wanted me. After the hearing, Five-Star told me to go on and buy my rig. They'd lease it on a steady work guarantee driver-owner basis. That way, I wouldn't need ICC authority. I'd asked for that kind of deal two years ago. They were not in-

terested. They figured I couldn't use the business I'd lined up and would toss it to them. But they'd let me go through all the headaches and get worked up thinking everything was fine. They didn't give me one damn word of warning that they planned to cut me down at that hearing. Hell, it's spoiling my steak thinking about it!"

There was a funny silence. The other drivers were looking past me as if they'd spotted a night-prowling insurance snooper tailing their rig. I glanced around and saw a jumpy little man in business clothes turn and go into the lounge. He'd been listening.

THE other drivers had left the restaurant ten minutes later. I was finishing my meal alone when the little man came back.

"Coffee and a pack of aspirins," he called to Sally, and sat beside me. "My name's Buskirk," he said to me. He handed me a business card, ticking the edge of it nervously with his thumbnail.

"Lawyer?" I said, glancing at the card.

"Yes. I can get that public convenience and necessity certificate."

"I had a lawyer."

He waved his cigarette impatiently. "If you and your one-truck possibility get mad at him, so what? But if a pair of fleet owners don't like him, that's different."

"I don't think I was double-crossed."

He watched Sally bring his order. He dumped the six aspirins from the little pack into his palm, gulped them and drank off half a cup of black coffee. He screwed up his leathery little face till his eyes shut. He shuddered, opened his eyes and exploded a harsh laugh. "Double cross! Who's talking about anything that crude. You had a nice-guy lawyer. A nice-guy lawyer with a future doesn't go around offending the wrong people."

"Nor eavesdropping."

"You should've been advised," Buskirk said, ignoring my remark, "that the odds

were against you at an ICC hearing, with the big guns *sure* to oppose. You got off cheap, getting smacked down at one sitting. The opposition could've stalled you legally for years, till you ran out of legal fees. I'd have showed you the sure way." He chain-lighted a cigarette, glanced at me. "Interested? Or did your licking make a good boy out of you?"

"Good and mad. Like you make me. But I'm interested."

"It's easier to get licensed by a state. You should've set up operations between cities in one state. *Then* you register the state certificate with the ICC. That way you can get interstate authority, automatically. Provided you comply with the rest of the ICC regulations; which you could do easily. But you don't have to argue at a hearing; don't have to buck the opposition of other outfits."

"Now I'm really sick!" I rapped my fist against my forehead. "I should've known. On the other hand, it would have been tough to make a go of it, even temporarily, on a one-state basis. The business I lined up was long-haul."

"True. The past is spilled milk, anyway. Here's why I'm bothering with you, Metz. I'm a lawyer for a one-truck outfit with a state license in this state. The company is on the rocks, because there's four owners trying to make a living off that one rig. Not a one of them works at it; they even have to hire a driver. They'll sell for the price of the truck. It's a damned good rig, only a year old. The point is, this company has a state license. You take it over, and you own the license. We go and register with ICC, and there you are!"

"Man, I want a look at that rig!"

Buskirk tossed a coin on the counter and got up. "Okay. Come on. Let's go and see if we can find it."

"Find it?" I asked, following him. He sailed out of the restaurant, across the lounge and outside. "What do you mean? It's lost."

"Get in," he said, indicating a sedan we were approaching. "Tell you all about it."

His driving made me nervous. He gunned it too hard, passed cars too close and never dimmed for an approaching car. Six miles from the truck stop he turned north on an intersecting state highway.

"It's a big, silver-colored truck. Winged Wheel Express, it's called." He laughed. "Poetic. Well, these poetic owners are lousy bosses. Drivers get burned up taking orders from four different people. Tonight, the latest driver called my house and said to tell the four of them he was done. He said he'd leave the rig in the middle of the road twenty miles from no place if a one of them said another word to him. I got the guy to promise me to bring the truck as far as Cleary's. But he's long overdue. He's got a load of hothouse vegetables and fruits that have to be at the city market here in the state capital by six this morning, or the company will lose the whole load."

"Isn't the semi-refrigerated?"

"It is. But the people at the market have had trouble with this truck before, and they'll refuse the whole load if it's not on time. The next market day is three days off. The shipper will sue the pants off of us, and the state license commissioner might decide to revoke the license and what the hell all I don't know!" He glanced at me. "If that driver quit and left us in a spot, will you take the rig over and get it to city market? It'll give you a chance to get the feel of the truck while you're about it."

"Well . . ." I hesitated. "It's about a two-hour run from Cleary's to the capital. I've had ten hours at the wheel and I'm supposed to have eight hours' rest, according to ICC rules."

"You mean you're too tired? Too tired to maybe save the state license that might be your ticket into business for yourself?"

It wasn't that. It was a feeling in the pit of my stomach like I got one time when

I was rolling an overloaded rig down a long, slick-wet hill and found out suddenly that the air pressure for the brakes had dropped to zero.

"This all seems . . . well, too fast. I don't want to decide anything this big when I'm groggy. Damn it, Buskirk, will you get on your side of the road? This time of night there's liable to be a drunk coming up the other side of this hill straddling the center-line too."

"Sorry." He swung over. "Nervous?"

We made the crest. The road was clear. "Yes, I am."

We rode, smoking, silent for a couple of miles without meeting any traffic. His headlights picked up the darkened business buildings of an intersection.

"There's the truck!" Buskirk exclaimed. "Tell you what, Metz," he said reasonably, easing down his speed. "You go on as you'd planned. Take your load wherever you're going. When you come back this direction you'll have had time to think. Stop over in the state capital and see me in my office then."

THE truck stood in front of the closed pumps of a filling station. As Buskirk turned in and stopped we saw the envelope under the windshield wiper.

"He must've left me a note," Buskirk said, getting out. He got the note and read it standing in his headlights while I waited uneasily. The big Winged Wheels Express rig was a beauty. The box, rising in a steep aluminum wall above the blunt, powerful lines of the tractor, was rounded just enough in front to cut the wind. The power was diesel.

Buskirk got back in the car, shut the door, snapped on the overhead light and handed me the note, chuckling. "Read that."

"I got a ride west and another job," it said. "I took too much from them hot-shots. Hope this makes them sweat once. You're o.k., Buskirk, but you'd start talk-

ing and I'd turn weak-minded again if I met you. Herman Sample."

Buskirk was backing onto the road. I said, "Wait, where you going?"

"Taking you back to Cleary's. I'll try to get a driver there," he said, braking.

"Let's see if he left the key," I said, getting out. "I'd like to feel this rig out."

Buskirk came around, fumbling with his key case. "I've got a spare ignition key for the truck," he said, detaching it and handing it to me.

I climbed up into the cab and he got in beside me. He found the manifest, pointed to the address of the consignee.

"There's the address you take the load to. It's a warehouse a few blocks from city market. They'll handle the load, get it onto smaller trucks and take it to the market. I'll tag along in my car and lead you; you probably don't know the streets. Then I'll be right there to run you back to Cleary's for your sleep. I appreciate this, Metz. It doesn't obligate you in any way. This is worth fifty bucks, and I'll pay it. That can be the end between us if you decide that way."

"We'll see. Hell, that driver must've overheated this engine," I said, pointing to the temperature reading. "It should've cooled off more than this." I started the engine, listened to it for a few seconds while Buskirk watched me. I nodded. "Sounds all right. Ought to pull good." I tapped a finger to the tachograph chart. "Lookit that, dammit! He was turning this engine at twenty-one hundred r. p. m. half the time."

"Bad?"

"Too much. But look there, too. Every few minutes she was out of gear. And I know just why!"

"What!"

"Sure. He was cowboying it. Shooting the hills as fast as he could. Dangerous as hell. There's no way of stopping a big load when it's charging at maybe a hundred miles an hour. Multiply that by this

fifty thousand pounds of gross weight, as on that manifest, and see what chance brakes would have. You'd burn the linings to cinders, or else they'd catch just enough to turn the whole rig upside down!"

Buskirk laughed. "C'mon. You're just trying to beat down the price."

"Maybe you're right. Anyway, you're lucky to be rid of a driver like that. He's a poor Sample. Joke."

I got out and checked tires and running lights. Buskirk got in his car and I threw the big rig into first gear. The strain of the pull shuddered through me. I gritted my teeth and cursed Herman Sample for abusing a sweet rig like this should've been. I got onto the road, headed back toward Cleary's, upped the gears gradually. I was in top gear and moving at fifty-five in a mile. The rig lay solid to the road and the pull was strong and smooth. Buskirk was tailing me about a quarter mile back.

There wasn't anything wrong with the rig after all, I decided. It had just had too much to pull, starting. I looked at the manifest again, puzzled. The gross said 50,000 pounds, but it felt more like 70,000 to me. Maybe more.

I looked at the driver's signature on the bottom of the sheet, puzzled. It didn't look quite like the same handwriting that had signed *Herman Sample* on the note to Buskirk.

I studied that tachograph chart again. Racing the engine, then cowboying down hills! Herman Sample sure hadn't given a damn. He must've known a reading like that would mess him up. His bosses could turn it over to the insurance people and it would cost him his job with almost any reputable outfit. The guy must've been drunk or crazy. Or scared. I got that shooting-downhill-without-brakes feeling in my gut again.

I started to gear down, watching for a wide solid shoulder where I could pull off. I found one and angled off the road. Almost at once Buskirk's car caught up with

me. He slammed the brakes, hopped out and came around to the door of the cab.

"What's wrong?" he yelled up.

"Flat. I can't drive it."

He darted to the front of the tractor, came back at once. "Fronts are okay. The rest are double wheels. One tire can bear the whole load temporarily. Roll that rig and to hell with it. We got no time!"

"You better drive it yourself," I said, climbing down. "Deliver your own vegetables and fruit." I laughed sourly.

"What's that kind of a laugh mean, Metz?"

"Who you trying to kid? There's something heavier than lettuce back in that box. I join Herman Sample in not wanting any part of it." We were standing face to face. He stared at me, bit his lip.

"Listen. It's on the level about the state license. Jack, in a week, I'll have this truck licensed to operate in interstate commerce. You'll own the company and licenses. Free. I've got to have a driver!"

"No thanks."

"Listen. There's two hundred thousand dollars worth of bonded whiskey there. It's hot, but it won't be missed until morning. But you're just a driver. Far as you know, you're hauling lettuce. All you do is push this truck to the receiving platform and walk away."

"What was Herman Sample running from? And where is he? Was he trying to get to the cops?"

Buskirk sprang backward, plunged a hand under his overcoat. He came out with a pistol. "You force me, Jack. Stand still. I'm going to park my car off the road. Make a run for it and I'll shoot you down. You're going to drive that truck; I'll be right on the seat with you to see that you do."

"I won't do your dirty work and then get killed. Shoot right now, mister."

"You fool. I don't want to kill you. I want this deal to swing, can't you see that? I'll only kill you if I must. Now, you'd

run right to the cops. It would mean a nasty investigation, and might even involve me in murder."

"Sample?"

"Yes. But he's being handled right now. If his body is found it'll be a thousand miles from here. Drive the truck, Jack. Don't force me to kill you. Afterwards I'll guarantee your safety. You and I will sign joint confessions implicating each other in this whiskey robbery. We'll put them in bank lock boxes. You can leave instructions to give the paper to the police if anything happens to you. But you won't ever want to use the confession. You'll be too busy handling your trucking company. You won't want to ruin me and that business you want so damned bad."

"I'll have this truck, permits, ICC authority, and the whole works, free?"

"Yes. Free. My solemn word."

"Okay. Park your car. I'll roll this rig."

He studied me for several seconds, then nodded. "Good. You're not a fool, after all."

I swung up into the cab, and called down. "You park up ahead, there. I'll pick you up."

HE GOT into his car, laying the gun on the seat. I got the load moving, angled onto the pavement while he parked a few yards ahead. He climbed out, sticking the gun in his overcoat side pocket as I rolled up even with him. I rammed the last ounce of power out of the diesel, and the tractor's double-pair of drive wheels dug in and lurched the whole load forward. His shout was sharp and tiny as a needle in the hell-roar of sound from the diesel. I couldn't see him, but I knew he had to jump back or get smashed by the trailer.

I slammed into second gear, into third, fourth. I was starting up the ladder of half-gears into top speed when his headlights glared into the rear-view mirror. There was a clear road ahead, but it

climbed, and I knew I couldn't begin to take it in top gear. He was coming after me, and fast. I swung over and blocked him from passing. He dropped back. I looked at the right-hand rear-view mirrors and saw him making a bid to come around me on the right.

I whipped the wheel sharp to one side. He swerved wildly onto the shoulder, then fell behind. I kept zigzagging and he caught the idea that a blow from the side of that long, loaded trailer would bat him in the ditch like a pingpong ball. My speed was down to thirty at the crest of the hill. I'd kept him from passing and I thought it would be clear sailing then. A long, empty hill lay before me. In the distance I saw approaching headlights. My scalp began to prickle. God, the timing would be close. The oncoming car wouldn't be at the foot of the hill before me, not unless he was burning the road.

I straddled the center line, climbed up to top speed, fast as I could shift. I got it to seventy, then threw out of gear. Those thirty-five tons began to roll, and I hung on, feeling the sudden wild hammering of my heart. I flicked my glance right and left at the rear-view mirrors, but Buskirk wasn't trying to pass. The speed was up to ninety-five in mid-hill. I couldn't hear the idling engine under the roar of the wind and the power drone of the massive tires. It was like falling powerless through space, and the sensation just hollowed out my gut.

Then it was hitting a hundred, a hundred-five. A bad hole in the road, a blowout, and it would be curtains. I began to feel that high wall of the box towering above the cab, and thought of some of the sights I'd seen where the loads had smashed forward and crushed cabs and drivers. I got the sweats, and I was so tense I was brittle. My hands were locked to the wheel and I suddenly knew I couldn't unlock them. It was like a huge hand was back of that rig, shoving, and

there wasn't any way that I could stop it.

The approaching headlights were closer than I'd figured. The car was barreling. I reached up and yanked the cord of the emergency whistle. I blasted out with it, time and again, an ear-splitting shriek like a locomotive's. I blinked the headlights rapidly on and off, snapped on the red emergency blinker light. The damned fool was coming bullet-straight down the middle of the road. Drunk? Asleep?

I forgot Buskirk. I tried to ease the steering wheel over. I couldn't yank; the rig would've crashed. I felt the sweat roll into my eyes and down my neck, and even my palms were soapy. I kept blasting with the emergency whistle. At the last minute, the approaching car edged onto his side of the road and I had got over a little myself. The car shot by with an explosive hiss. Then I was on the straightaway, on the right side of the road.

Buskirk was crawling along the left side of the long trailer. The level was eating down on my speed. I was rolling too fast to gear in. He came up toward the front of the trailer, inch by inch. I couldn't maneuver enough to do any better than crowd him toward the ditch. I couldn't get him over far enough or fast enough.

Then he was riding alongside the cab. His right window was open and I saw the winking splashes of yellow light from his gun. Three-four-five. I don't know how many shots. He tried to shoot ahead, then, and it happened. His car went out of control. I heard the thud and ripping crash as the front edge of the trailer smashed into him.

I got stopped in another half mile. I climbed down and just sat on the ground—I don't know how long.

The cops had come and gone. They had my story and I had leave to go on with my load. Buskirk was dead. At that time they hadn't found Herman Sample's body, but the next day they did, along with some buddies of Buskirk's.

"VIRTUE is its own reward," I told the drivers in Cleary's a week later. I sipped coffee, my little finger extended elegantly, then napkinned my lips delicately. "When I finished my run into New York last week, there were telegrams waiting for me. The insurance company had a thousand buck reward—and a couple cases of whiskey. Remember that, lads, whenever you are tempted to make disrespectful remarks to me."

"Yes, sir!"

"That's the spirit. Also I was informed that the National Trucking Association had selected me Driver of the Month. I am to get the presentation at a banquet, where I will make a speech. You want to hear it?"

"No!" "Bring ear plugs!" "Save us, merciful Lord."

"Two cases bonded whiskey."

"Please let us hear your beautiful speech."

"Nuts. But listen to the payoff. I was going to be interviewed by *Transport Topics*, and I got to thinking, here I am in the spotlight of the whole industry. I sent some telegrams to all the outfits who had opposed my ICC application, asking them to help me write up my speech and my story, as I am just a little guy and will be talking to all the bigwigs. You know what happened? They all withdrew their opposition, and furthermore filed reports supporting my application. They got a special session called.

And I'm in!

"Now I'll have a real nice, heartwarming success story."

I got a notice the other day that a new trucker was going to apply for authority to operate at an ICC hearing. I had a right to oppose, said the notice. I got thinking of some new mug trying to muscle in and I burned, and decided I'd sure as hell be at that hearing! Then I was sorry I wasn't double-jointed; I needed a kick in the tail. I threw the notice away. ■ ■ ■



Founded in 1924

Article No. 863

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5475—Trenchant Treatment. By °Ty Roc. Another limerick, fans! Try lone B as "a." Then OBKS (-a-), twice before quotes, "said." Next, UKO (-is), "his"; OUF (sh-), "she"; etc.

B UPGGKEVZ YHVZ HPGKVVB HPR UKO AKTF B TKXF DPBR
PT DUKXDUKVVB, RUFY OBKS: "AKTKF SFBG, HKLF PYR
AKRU OPNF EFFG!" OBKS OUF: "ZPY RBJF OBGQBQBGKVVB!"

No. 5476—Unintended Terms. By Londoner. Note L, LD, and DNN, for a starter. Or take two-letter word YA, after comma in word-series, with pattern-word NAAAYA.

NFNA DNN L "RSYDK BYAE"? DGPS BYAE SLD TY ANLZ
NQUDKNTPN, ONUTREGN KY NAAAYA OJ DXNLVNA, BAUKNA,
NEUKYA, YA XAUTKNA. KSGD, *VYANLT *BLA ALEUY
OAYLEPLDK ANXYAKD "DLOAN INKD" LD "ILOAN DNKD."

No. 5477—Interesting Origin. By John DeVore. Compare UP and -UPV. Proceed then with ZUPVG, noting ZNUPV. Other entry, GT and TAGL, latter transposed to make TGAL.

ZUPVG, TCLGDH VCLN GT TURN-UP-C-AGE, KAGZCZOB
YCLN TAGL *UFCOB, ZNUPV C TGAL GT YNPFDAUNH-GOX
*VNPNGHN VCLN OGFFG, SPGEPU *CLNAUYC CH SNPG.

No. 5478—Good Advice. By †Helcrypt. Note letters in common to short words SPY, SA, and ASPYB. Follow up with ZYSPAX and ZAVSP; and so on.

SPY RYTS ZYSPAX SA VTY, KD NAV GOHS SA GKH OH

OBVCZYHS, KT SA EKTSYH FOBYDVEEN SA GPOS SPY
 ASPYB ZOH POT SA TON, SPYH LYYU NAVB ZAVSP TPVS.

No. 5479—Accommodating Climate. By Bill Thomas. Try common short words for ADV, ADZB, AE, and BE, also ADOT and OT. Continue then with DEAAVU and KOBVU, etc.
 HEAT EN LECCRBOAOVT KVUV DEAAVU ADZB *DVHH ADOT
 TRCCVU. YRA *DVHH OATVHN KOHH BE XERYA NUUVGV
 EPVU ADOT KOBVU. *DVHH, ADV TRYRUY EN *ZBB
 *ZUYEU, *COLD, OT UVNVUUVX AE, EN LERUTV.

No. 5480—A Sudden Stop. By E. D. H. Identify affixes PO-, -POB, and -DPYO through letters in common. Next, develop YOU-ARE HDGUUDH, then BUD-RARE, etc.
 ZROJPD BUD-RARE XRGH, DGRSUFPOB YOU-ARE HDGUUDH,
 XRGUVO RD PODUGHUXDPYO, XGRHT APDT DUGGPVPX
 PNLRXD, XRKHU DAY-TYKG DUO-XRG DGRVVPX DPU-KL.
 RNZKFROXUH, XGKPHUGH XFKDDUG XYFFPHPYO HXUOU.

No. 5481—Tricky Tactics. By *Sara. Ending -TTOT, correctly guessed, will unlock OKOFAETTOT, latter giving all but first symbol in HEATO. Next, AUUGT, TGUNOT, etc.

VEAL-YOEIOL, BAOEP-TYEXOP, PUP-TROBGEBAOL GYZF
 LUPT JSF, HEATO VOENL, OKOFAETTOT, AUUGT YUDOT,
 NUVT TGUNOT. NODUXOT LSTFZSTO, OAZLOT RUASBO.

No. 5482—But Tomorrow? By Capt. Kidd. Three-letter HBU will unlock UNNUD and duly noting ending -XBV, will lead to XBBPTNBR. Next, try starred word; etc.

*AHYYPFNBNB GNDRNKUHG: FXBUPF DPHLXBV, OPBSXKND,
 VHRN AXUXBV, HILYN UETCBV, DXZXYHK APKKNBUPED
 UNNUD! HBU RPUHG: HERP FKNTCBV, RAEVVNKG,
 HKDPB, KPOONKG, ZEKUNK, PRANK XBBPTNBR HBRXTD.

No. 5483—A Score and More. By *S. A. L. Symbol A, frequency 12, is featured 8 times initial, and doubled once. Can you guess pattern word HAAHFBKY?

AHUH AUNTYS AUNTPOUT ABCDEYF AYK AHCT. NCBGNU
 SYNSF, MBFSOAKF LNGY. HAAHFBKY KYNG SYNDEYF AHFK
 PBSFK. [†]DNAKNBC, POSBHOF, AOCBFEYF KSDZFKYS.

No. 5484—Turning the Tide. By Anon. Twenty-six words here, with as many different initial letters! Remember, asterisks in cryptograms precede capitalized words.

ZTVW YLZGNVM XZONOB WVUB VMVNB. ULIN TFVIROOZ
 SLIWV, RMELPV QFHGRXV. PZBZP OLHG, NZIRMV MLNZW
 LKVMOB KILERWVH JFRCLGRX IVYVOH HZUV GIZMHKLIG,
 FHRMT EZIRLFH DLIGSB CVYVXH, BVOORMT AVHGUFOOB.

FOR a transposition cipher of exceptional interest, try "Jaybee's current No. X-5486! In a cipher of this class, as most of you already know, the plain-text units retain their normal values, being merely changed in their order by some device which provides the cryptographic key. "Jaybee has employed as his key a modified rectangle based on a certain well-known military formation, the name of which occurs in his message, though not there used in the military sense.

No. X-5486—Transposition Cipher. By "Jaybee.

SOMFLR	HATELU	NAOORH
VELICU	LEEETT	LTUNTI
OONTEP	WTWYRL	NENSRA
TSEEDD	QARWAO	PAAUPY

In enciphering No. X-5486, letters of the plaintext were inscribed into the geometrical form by normal horizontals, from top to bottom, and extraction of the cipher was by descending verticals, left to right, in groups of six letters. A valuable clue: letter "q" is followed in English by "u," and "qu" by another vowel, as "qua," "que," etc. The intervals indicated by this sequence may lead you to the discovery of other sequences and eventually to the geometrical structure. Answer in full will appear in next issue!

Vulcan's "Chameleon Square," No. X-5474 in last issue, could be solved either as a word puzzle direct from the definitions, or as a cipher problem by methods applied to ordinary cryptograms. By the latter method, the first set of cipher groups would become STRING plus APPLY minus SING minus PLY, addition and subtraction giving TRAP; and so on. The complete word-square is given herewith. Encipherment of this square, with the same alphabet, gave the second square. Did you get it?

(1)	(2)
T R A P	P A T H
R O L L	A L E E
A L S O	T E I L
P L O T	H E L P

Here's another of our special rules for solving cryptic divisions, use of which will spot digit 5 for you in Vedette's No. 5485. The rule: In two subtractions of single digits, where minused and subtrahend symbols are interchanged and show the same difference symbol, (such as $X - Y = Z$ and $Y - X = Z$), both subtractions will be without "carry" and the common difference will be 5, or both will have a "carry" and the common difference will be 4. For example in No. 5485, note $R - H = L$ and $H - R = L$. The latter subtraction is in units position, hence without "carry," indicating that the other subtraction also is without "carry," and identifying symbol L as 5. Keep your contributions and answers coming, fans! Look for answers to current puzzles in next issue!

No. 5485—Cryptic Division. By Vedette. Find 5

by method just given. Note also the linked sequences. The keyphrase is numbered: 01234 56789.

R F G) E T O G R H (E U G
F F E E

U U R R
O R H I

G L G H
U R O R

I O L

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5463—Old fishermen *never* lie;

They simply fish away,

Even as you and I,

Upon a summer's day.

That's why they never lie—

They simply fish away!

5464—"I left for Kansas City in Eighteen Forty Two; when I reached the city, was feeling very blue. I hadn't any money for nary a vittle to buy; all I could do, was 'Roqt, hog, or die!'"

5465—Probably no woman will become United States president. For she must reach thirty-five! And what lady would ever admit that many years?

5466—Teacher asked Sunday class what weapon Samson used to slay Philistines. Profound silence.

Tapping his chin, he prompted: "What is this?"

"The jawbone of an ass!" was the quick reply.

5467—Mnemonics, from the Greek word "mnemon," for "mindful," may be defined as an organized system of rules and devices to aid in memory training.

5468—Alberta northwester blew two thousand post holes out of ground, hundred miles, over cactus country. Rancher finally found them total ruin, so full of holes they wouldn't hold out dirt!

5469—Gray gelding: "Running races! How hot! Phew!" Frisky filly: "Don't despair! Papers predict great grandstand, ten-thousand turnout!"

5470—Pep up picnics with palatable canapes, colorful spring salads, tasty sliced-chicken sandwiches, and home-baked plum cake. Yum! Yum!

5471—During church service hum, overzealous music devotee spies piano, plays boogie-woogie, also jazz. Youthful laugh, elders cough, parson phones police. Hoosergow awaits mad musician.

5472—Family daguerreotype album awakens nostalgic memories: stiff collars, mustaches, burn-sides, vandyke beards; starched pinafores, beribboned crinolines, pigtailed. Epochal elegance!

5473—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
B O U N D A R I E S

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our Cipher Solvers' Club. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.



*He fell headlong into the
hole. . . .*

**By
Winston Bouvé**

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE

Copyright 1934 by Popular
Publications, Inc., under
the title "An Unfilled
Grave."

*When Link Haley got one foot in
the baby-snatchers' doorway, he
had the other foot in his own
grave. . . .*

LINK HALEY slammed down the battered hood of the Ford he had hired in the county seat, ten miles back, and swore. There wasn't another spark to be coaxed out of the old wreck!

It was cold, for late April, and the spring rains had played havoc with the bleak New Hampshire countryside. A starless night

brooded over solitude and silence. But unless he'd taken a wrong fork somewhere along these mountain roads, he couldn't be far from his destination.

With a grunt Haley tested his flash, rammed an elbow into the hard bulge of the .38 he seldom carried, and started the uphill climb. Slogging along through the icy mire, he realized that he hadn't passed a lighted house since driving through the little hamlet of Gilman, two miles below.

The big yellow farmhouse that was his objective appeared as he reached the brow of the hill. Light streamed from a side window. The dark barns and outbuildings were big, well-kept. That would be Sam Dacy's place, all right. Dacy was a dairy farmer.

Haley took the beaten path to the rear, his coat-tails flapping about his muddy legs. At the door, he knocked.

He knocked again. Queer. . . . Dacy was expecting him. A prescience of something wrong—something very wrong—stirred his sandy-colored hackles as he put a big shoulder to the door.

The door gave in. And Link Haley, recoiling, from what the warm kitchen held, knew that no false lead had brought him here.

Old Sam Dacy lay spread-eagled on the floor, his face the hue of lead. His thin chest had been riddled by a blast from a sawed-off shotgun. He'd bled a lot. And yet—was it only the shadow from the oil lamp in its wall bracket, or was there a flicker of life in him?

Haley, kneeling over him, drew a grim breath. The blue eyelids quivered.

"It's Haley, Lincoln Haley, Dacy," he said, close to the dying man's ear. "You remember—Senator Lonerger's friend. Can you speak? Just a word, Dacy—just the name you didn't give us. . . ."

The filming eyes showed a faint spark. And then the leaden lips moved. The word was lost in a bubble.

"Try, Dacy. For that kid's sake. . . ."

"C-caddy. . . ." Sam Dacy said. And again, "The—caddy."

And then, very easily, he died.

Link Haley stood up, mopping the sweat from his freckled face. His ears still rang with Sam Dacy's dying gasp. His killers had turned the neat kitchen inside out. And they hadn't neglected the man they left for dead, either! The pockets of his fleecelined coat, the pockets of his jeans, gaped.

Haley gnawed his underlip savagely. What a hell of a break!

Seven weeks before, a snatch mob had lifted old Senator Lonerger's million dollar grandson from his nursery in the famous Back Bay mansion—and vanished into the void. Every lead, every clue, every crank letter from all over the country had been followed down, proved worthless—until Sam Dacy's cautious summons had brought Haley, the aged senator's foster-son and political protégé, up here hot-footed, but too late.

Haley skirted the body on the floor, jangled the wall phone above the disordered roll-top desk. After a maddening delay, he got the sheriff.

SHERIFF NASON didn't waste any time getting out to Dacy's dairy farm. Within minutes he barged into the bloody shambles of a kitchen, his gray beard quivering, his eyes snapping with excitement. He looked Haley over suspiciously; relaxed somewhat when Haley produced papers of identification.

"You sure spelled tramp to me at first look, mister," he said. "But I reckon I can take a chance on you. How come? You didn't just happen by to find Sam plugged?"

"Not on your life!" Haley said grimly. "Mister Dacy's tip brought me up here from Boston on the Lonerger kidnaping, Sheriff. And Dacy's murder proves his hunch was good!"

"The Lonerger kidnaping. . . ." Pop Nason's jaw sagged.

Haley didn't have to go into detail. The

case had never left the front pages since it broke, despite the awful paucity of clues. And since the payment of the first hundred thousand had leaked out, the whole country was aroused.

For that hundred grand wasn't the ransom sum entire. It was a gesture of good faith, demanded by the kidnapers before they would even enter into negotiations! They meant to jack the senator out of a cool half million before he saw the kid again.

"If the senator had called in the cops, the Department of Justice, earlier, maybe—but what the hell?" Haley finished. "If *your* only son and his wife had died in a plane crash six months back, and their year-old kid had been snatched, you'd probably take orders from the snatch mob too. At first anyway. . . ."

He smacked a fist into a hard palm, nodded toward the dead man. "But we're going to get 'em, and get the kid too, Nason! Sam Dacy's tip was hot, all right—so hot it blasted him to hell and gone, tonight. The kidnapers have their hideout so near here they've been buying milk from him! And if he'd lived just a minute longer. . . ."

Scowling, he repeated Sam Dacy's dying gasp. "Caddy' . . . that's all he had time to say. And unless there's a golf club around here, it doesn't make sense. But here's what he wrote Lonerган."

He tossed a letter onto the kitchen table.

"Golf club over to Devlin burned down last summer," the sheriff said succinctly. He squinted at the single, blue-lined sheet, and Haley read the words he knew by heart over his shoulder:

Dear Senator Lonerган:

Think I have information of value re your boy's kidnaping. There is a family here, new, who don't look right to me. They got two kids, but I think that is fishy too. They give me this money yesterday for milk bill and then tried to get it back. I think it is one of the bills the paper said you paid out.

Please send someone up to talk to me. I am keeping quiet at this end until you do.

But I feel kind of nervous about the matter, and some upset.

Yours respectfully,
Sam'l Dacy.

"He had something, all right!" Link Haley said grinning. "That half of a twenty is one of the bills Senator Lonerган paid over while he was still playing ball with the snatch mob. I helped him take those serial numbers."

The sheriff handed back the letter and the torn bill that was pinned to it.

"Sam must've thrown a bad scare into them when he wouldn't give back that twenty. Reckon that's what they tore up the place, looking for."

"That and something else!" Haley glowered at the disordered desk. "A memorandum of milk he'd sold to these birds, under the name they're using! We've got something to go on, anyway. A new family, with two kids, who've settled in this general vicinity. Think fast, Pop! These birds aren't going to stick around, after tonight's job. And it's a fifty-fifty bet whether they'll risk taking little Dave Lonerган with them."

Sheriff Nason shook his grizzled head. "Ain't any new family settled here as lately as that kidnaping, son! I'd know if there was. Why in tarnation didn't Sam tell me what was on his mind—or speak sense at the end?"

Link Haley jerked around suddenly.

"He did, Pop! We're the saps not to have taken him at his dying word. Caddy—sure. Tea caddy. . . ."

Sam Dacy had been a tidy old bachelor. There were canned goods, and sugar, and tea in a black tin canister, in a neat row above the sink.

It wasn't the thirty-odd dollars in bills and silver Link shook out of the battered caddy that made his scalp tingle. It was a slip of paper, with a number of dates and sums on it, beneath a name! Pinned to it was half of a twenty dollar bill—and a week-old clipping from a Sunday newspaper.

The slip was a scrawled memorandum of milk, butter and eggs sold to a Mrs. A. Schultz, to date!

THE clipping was a short human interest story topped with the bad likeness of a skinny, pig-tailed child of ten or so. One Mary Josephine Brown, foundling, had disappeared from the grounds of the Big Sister Orphanage, in upper Massachusetts, one autumn day six months back. No trace of her had ever been found—nor of the well-dressed couple who had visited the home a day earlier, wanting to adopt a little girl.

Haley raced through the sob sister story, a mirthless grin on his lips.

"Sam Dacy came through all right! Schultz, huh? Know 'em, Sheriff?"

"It don't fit," Pop Nason said soberly. "Sam got that twenty somewheres else—or the Schultzes did. They're the city folks that bought the old Nelson place over in Mill Hollow last fall, on account of his health. Sickly looking feller, Schultz is. They got a big hired hand, and two kids, all right. One's a baby—but the other's a boy of eight or nine. And they been here more'n six months, Haley!"

That staggered Haley, but only for a minute.

"So what?" he snapped. "That's just what a snatch mob with brains enough would do, Pop—plant that kind of a lay, that far ahead! A boy of eight, huh? And a baby. . . . I'm betting nobody has seen much of those kids!"

"You win!" Pop Nason said huskily. "Nobody has. . . ."

"I want a look at the Schultzes, and their eight-year-old 'boy', and their baby!" Link Haley rasped. "Sure, they came here with two kids last fall. But I'm betting my bottom dollar little Dave Lonergan is substituting for the baby they brought up here first! Where's the Nelson place, and what's the layout?"

And as Pop Nason told him of the tumble-down Nelson farm, miles from any-

where, at the end of a corduroy road—bought when even "city folks" could have done better for their money, Haley's certainty grew.

"Ever hear of Big Jake Schiff, Pop?" Haley asked softly. "I have. He was quite a racketeer, here in the East. Afky—dope—everything. But after repeal he faded out of the picture. So did his platinum blonde and his running mate, Mickey Horan. And Horan's a sickly little guy. . . . I'm just wondering, that's all!" He weighed his .38 in a big palm.

The "Schultzes"—the "light complexioned wife and sickly husband"—fitted into Link's hunch like a hand in a glove. So did the big hired man! Big Jake, minus his tailor-made clothes and snappy silk shirts, was just smart enough to cast himself in that rôle. Yes, it all fitted. . . .

"Let's get goin'," Sheriff Nason said grimly. "I'll get me a couple of deputies, and we'll pile in on 'em!"

Haley shook his head, sliding off his shoulder holster. "No soap with those babies, Pop! They're sitting on dynamite, after tonight's job, and they know it. You think they'd let us walk in on them? We've got to think of the Lonergan kid—both kids. Now listen to this set-up, like a good guy. . . ."

He talked swiftly, urgently. And as he talked, the skepticism faded from the sheriff's face.

"Can't think of any better way to ease in on 'em, the scum!" Pop Nason agreed at last, morosely. "But I wouldn't hanker after the bite you've chewed off for yourself, son."

Link Haley grinned mirthlessly at his gaunt, unshaven image in the mirror over the sink. He didn't hanker after putting his scheme to a life-and-death test, himself! But as he saw it, he had just one chance of getting the drop on the murderous snatch mob before they beat it. And once panicked into flight, he knew they wouldn't burden themselves with the two kids.

He discarded his hat and overcoat, smirched grime into the stubble of his cheeks and chin. His unpressed, muddled suit was all right, too!

"If I ever spotted a tough guy on the lam, it's me!" He grinned. "And after you've let me out at the Mill Hollow fork, and I've floundered through half a mile more of muddy road, our friends ought to get the same idea. . . . All set, Pop?"

"All set," the sheriff said thinly. He paused on the threshold for a last look at the dead man on the floor. "Makes me feel kind of bad, leaving Sam like this. But I reckon he won't mind. Always liked kids, Sam did."

* * *

The house in the hollow was a disreputable, tumble-down ruin of a place. Link, breathing hard from his floundering run since he'd jumped from Sheriff Nason's car, and the echoes of the sheriff's three revolver shots ringing in his ears, worked his way to the rear.

Faint cracks of light showed through the shuttered windows, offering no welcoming beam. But Link, his palm sweating on the gun that sagged in his coat pocket, eyed the stealthy glimmer with satisfaction. His birds hadn't flown, at any rate! He scuffed up the path, making no attempt at silence.

His hackles lifted as he stumbled over a loose board and whirled about, half expecting a blast of hot lead. But only his own breathing broke the uncanny silence. A grim smile twitched his sweat-beaded upper lip. It wouldn't take any extra good acting on his part, to play the rôle of a hunted man. . . .

He clumped up the stoop, and knocked. Silence. He knocked again, listening. And then, though he had heard no footstep—knew there had been none to hear—the door opened an inch or two.

A woman's face, suspicious, hostile, showed. "Well?" she snapped.

She stood against the light, and he couldn't make much of her drab coloring, her coarse good looks. But if this farm drab was Jake Schiff's platinum blond moll, then six months' living in Mill Hollow had done plenty to her!

"Could you help a guy out with a cup of java an' a place to sleep?" Link asked huskily. "I—I'm all in, lady—honest. . . ."

She might have slammed the door in his face. Tramps aren't welcome in New England hamlets. But she didn't. She opened it wider, and he saw a slovenly kitchen, littered with unwashed pots and pans.

"Just a bum!" she said contemptuously. "Shall I tell him to beat it, Jim?"

She was speaking to the big, heavy-set man who hunched forward in a rocker beyond the cherry-red kitchen stove. His face was in the shadow, but Link's eyes were on his huge, work-grimed hands, that lay heavy, lax, on a piece of harness he seemed to be mending. Big Jake Schiff, for all his criminal activities, had never once been mugged. A Boston dick would have been able to spot him in this or any other guise, maybe—but Link couldn't.

"Give him a break," the big fellow said, in a flat, slow voice. "It's a tough night to be bumming it."

For a minute, Link Haley doubted the chain of reasoning that had brought him here. What solid ground had he for his hunch, after all? A dead man's suspicions; a twenty dollar bill that might have come into the Schultzes' possession innocently enough. Sam Dacy had named his killers only by implication.

The kitchen looked innocent enough. Just like any other farmhouse kitchen kept by a slatternly woman. And the casualness with which these two accepted his intrusion was disarming.

Link, still panting on the threshold, taking in every square inch of the lamplit room, wondered if he was all wet. And then, as he moved to one side to let the woman slam and bolt the door behind him, he knew, exultant—

ly, that he wasn't. The look that passed between "Mrs. Schultz" and her "hired hand" resolved all his doubts. Just that one wary, urgent question she shot at him from pale-lashed, gleaming eyes, that he answered with a furtive droop of an eyelid. . . .

"Sure, we'll give you a handout," the man said, softly. "Come in."

A LEATHER windbreaker hung from a nail beside the door. As the woman turned toward the stove, where a coffee pot bubbled, Link snatched his opportunity. For a brief instant, she was between him and the "hired hand." And that instant sufficed. Link stumbled, as a weary man will, lurched sidewise. And when he recovered himself, sidled forward with a mumbled, "Thanks," his gun was no longer in his pocket. In that split second he'd decided, acted. It might be suicidal to ditch his only weapon—but now, with his revolver cached in the pocket of the windbreaker, out of sight, he had a chance of retrieving it later. And if they searched him, and found the weapon on him, his number was up.

His snap judgment was justified before he'd taken another step.

Maybe it was the sight of a limp rag-doll sprawling beside the wood-box; maybe it was the sound of a baby's croupy cough from an adjoining room, that set the blood beating in Link's ears so that he didn't hear the furtive creak of a door to his left. A cold air-current struck his neck, and he wheeled about as the big fellow snickered.

He found himself staring into the twin muzzles of a sawed-off shotgun. It was leveled at him by a thin, pale little ape of a man whose pockmarked pallor emphasized the evil glitter of his killer's eyes.

"Nice work, Mike," the big fellow said. And then he laughed again. "Take it easy, feller. We don't like tramps, here. We're funny that way. Frisk him, Babe."

Link Haley knew he was closer to death than he'd ever been in his life, and he'd had

some pretty close calls. But as he raised his arms while the woman slapped her hands over him with vicious efficiency, he knew no fear. He only knew, with fierce satisfaction, that his hunch hadn't led him wrong! He'd tracked the kidnapers to their lair—and the Lonergan baby was whooping spasmodically on the other side of the peeling, splotchy wall! The rest was up to him—and to old Pop Nason.

Yeah, the wicked-looking little guy who called himself Schultz was Micky Horan, all right! Those pockmarked features gave him dead away. *He wasn't a big enough shot to have escaped the line-up!*

And that sawed-off shotgun was the weapon that had blasted old Sam Dacy, not two hours ago. . . .

He had 'em cold, and he knew it. But he wondered grimly, as Micky Horan sidled forward, just how much good it was going to do him.

"He don't smell tramp to me," Micky Horan said softly. "So what, Big Boy?"

Both he and the drab blonde waited on the "hired hand's" words. Big Jake Schiff had always had the rep of ruling his mob with an iron hand.

He said, "Don't scare the guy to death, Mike. Not before we have a little talk with him. Sit, you. . . ."

Link slumped down in the kitchen chair that the big fellow jerked forward with one huge, booted foot. His eyes went from the man to the woman in stupid, frightened bewilderment.

Jake Schiff hadn't been mending harness when he knocked at the kitchen door, Link saw now. He had been changing his shoes. His high, muddled boots lay just under the stove. His big feet were encased in well-polished, well-made black oxfords now. But only one was tied. The shoestrings of the other trailed on the dirty floor. Link made a mental note of that.

"You got me all wrong, see?" Link mumbled shakily. "For God's sake, mister, be reasonable. Tell that guy I jes' wanted a

handout. A place to sleep, maybe. . . I—I'm in a tough spot, that's all. . ."

Why didn't the phone ring? Was Sheriff Nason forgetting his play—or was the old dodo changing the deal?

"Listen . . ." he whined. "Give a guy a break, can't you? I didn't mean to scare the lady none. Lemme beat it, will you?"

The phone jangled furiously, drowning out that croupy cough and the baby's cry in the next room. Link started as if he'd been shot.

"Lemme beat it!" he begged huskily. "I can't stick around here, honest . . . these hick dicks'd frame a guy like me for anything! I ain't got a chance, I'm telling you. . ."

"In trouble, huh?" the big fellow snapped. "Spill it—quick!"

Link opened and shut his mouth, breathing hard. The woman, hands clenched on the table-top, was waiting for orders, her pale-lashed eyes fixed glacially on him. The phone jangled on.

"There's a big yellow house down the road a ways," Link whispered. "I stopped there first, see? But nobody answered. I—I been on the road a couple of days now. I jes' wanted something in the belly, that's all. . ."

He stopped, passed an arm over his sweating lip.

"Answer the phone!" the big fellow told the woman. "Then stop that kid's squalling."

She went to the phone, took the receiver off "Yeah, this is Mrs. Schultz speaking . . . yeah. You don't say, Sheriff? Mr. Dacy. . . Gee, that's terrible!"

Link could hear old Pop Nason's voice crackle excitedly over the wire. Her own gasp of smothered horror sounded natural enough, too.

"What's that? You picked up the guy that did it and he got away from you? . . . Sure, we'll be careful . . . Not a soul's been around here tonight, Sheriff. . . Sure, we'll be on the lookout. . ."

She came back. The hot, dirty room crackled with tension. "You heard," she said huskily. "Somebody killed that milkman down the road. The sheriff's looking for a big tramp that got away from him . . . the old goat'll be snooping around any time now. . ."

Link, still playing his rôle, saw her cower back at the big fellow's soft, infinitely menacing, "So what?"

Then Link took the longest chance of his life. He sprang up, made a dash for the door, past Micky Horan and his sawed-off shotgun, reckoning on just one thing—that Micky wouldn't blast him until Big Jake gave the word. Not with that particular weapon, and not with Sheriff Nason due here at any minute.

HE GUESSED both wrong and right. Murder flickered in Micky Horan's beady eyes, trembled in his trigger finger, as Link ducked for the door—and the leather windbreaker that hung beside it, where he'd cached his gun.

But Big Jake lunged forward, struck Horan's wrist down with his hamlike hand. The shotgun clattered to the floor.

"Not here, you hopped-up fool!" he snarled. His big, pale face was livid with rage. "Back into the room, you!" he ordered Link, his right hand flashing to his hip.

"Not yet!" Link rapped out. He'd moved like chain lightning. The feel of his gun, retrieved from its dubious hiding place, was more intoxicating than any drink. "Drop that gun, Jake Schiff—you're covered!" His toe found the sawed-off shotgun, sent it crashing into the farthest corner of the room. "The Lonergan snatch was too big a racket for you, Jake. . . Line up against that wall—all of you!"

His cached .38, arcing in his steady grip, gave the command menace enough. He had the drop on them, thanks partly to luck—partly to his own quick-wittedness. He'd gauged to a split second the confused

reaction of the three to old Pop Nason's telephone call.

"Okay," Big Jake said, lids drooping. "Don't get tough. You got us by the short hair. . . ."

Maybe if the moment's triumph hadn't made his head swim, Link would have kept his advantage. Maybe it was the sudden outburst of small, thudding fists against that inner, locked door, behind which a baby wailed, that took him off his guard to a fractional degree.

"The kid's sick," the woman called Babe answered his curt question sullenly. "Croup or some damned thing. Joey's been wet-nursing him."

"Your 'little boy'," Link said drily. "Let her out—but make it slow and easy. I wouldn't want to get the notion you were reaching for anything but that bolt on the door."

Her low, bitter oaths were more venomous than Micky Horan's chattered vituperation. And when the gaunt, cropped-headed child in blue overalls slunk out, as a puppy that's been kicked and starved slinks past its persecutor, Link had a vicious yen to do the woman some physical hurt. For the kid was scared of her. And there were red, angry burns on the child's little pipestem arms.

A spasm of whooping came from the cold back bedroom off the kitchen.

"Steam kettle, he has to have," Mary Josephine Brown said practically. "That's what they always did, in the orph—"

She clapped one small, grimed hand to her lips, her eyes flickering back to the woman, in deadly terror.

There was a tea kettle on the stove, and at Link's terse nod she reached for it, straining. He should have been on trigger-tough for any eventuality. He should have noticed how close the woman stood to the stove. But he didn't—until it was too late.

She'd wrested the tea kettle of boiling water from the child's uncertain grasp, hurled it straight at Link, before he guessed

her intent. He had to duck, or take that whole scalding, blinding dose full in the face. And he couldn't shoot blindly, because the woman called Babe had snatched up the child as a shield.

Then, as he bit back a yell wrung from him by that scalding agony, at the same time trying to force his burned-raw fingers tight about the gun, Big Jake lunged forward, a stove-lid handle swinging in his hand. And the room crashed in upon him in a tumult of confusion and pain.

* * *

He came back to consciousness gallingly. As his throbbing head cleared, and the red-hot pain of his burned face and hand increased, Link tasted defeat as bitter as wormwood.

He'd had his chance—his lucky break—and he'd fumbled it. He wouldn't get another. And the penalty for that single second off-guard was plenty.

His head cleared some more. Where the hell was he? Darkness and the smell of earth and mold encompassed him. He tried to move and found himself trussed up like a fowl for slaughter. But he did manage to roll over.

And then he understood the strange, rhythmic thud and fall that beat like a dirge upon his consciousness, above the roar, of blood in his ears.

He lay in a cellar, bound, helpless—and at the far end of the earthy cavern a lantern gave a feeble light. By its flicker three moving shadows bulked, grotesque, macabre. One bent to each thud, and a soft *plop* sounded. Then the figure straightened, cursing.

Big Jake Schiff was digging a grave!

Things weren't quite clear to Link for a minute. Then the salt taste of blood that trickled down his cheek from the bleeding lump on his head brought him back. That, and a boot in his ribs.

"Coming out of it now, snoop?" Micky

Horan asked. "You'd better. We need a big, husky guy like you. . . ."

His bonds were slashed through. He stumbled somehow to his feet, swaying, and saw a dark bundle lying, trussed up as he had been, against a pile of lumber. It was old Pop Nason. He was a sick looking old guy, under his leathery tan, and his sparse gray hairs were dabbled with clotted blood. But his faded blue eyes blazed at Link with indomitable fire, above the dirty gag in his mouth.

The prod of the shotgun's muzzle gouged Link's kidneys, and he stumbled toward the ghoulish, lantern-lit tableau.

What had happened to the Lonerger baby—and the game little kid from the orphanage? He felt sicker at that unanswered question than from the still bleeding lump on his head.

Those kids . . . he'd had a chance to save them, and he'd muffed it.

Then, just as he reached the black, earthy trench that Big Jake was deepening with every play of his shovel, he saw, huddled against a woodpile, a small, crouching shape. It was Mary Josephine, and it wasn't a doll she strained against her thin little chest. It was something that whimpered hoarsely huddled up in a shawl, in uneasy sleep.

The woman Babe, dressed now for the getaway, in a long, rakishly furred coat and smart little hat, stood over them, a malignant figure of doom. Two suitcases, strapped and bulging, were ready at hand.

"Dig!" Big Jake ordered curtly. "And don't skimp if you want to lie comfortable." His fat, pale face creased in merriment at his own jest. "We weren't planning on using this for four. . . ."

He thrust the shovel into Link's hands, snatched the shotgun from Micky Horan.

And Link, burying the spade into that soft loam, realized that a smaller trench had already been dug long since, concealed, obviously, under that litter of lumber outside the circle of light.

"A foot more'll do it," the woman said thoughtfully. "For God's sake, Jake, hurry it up! Let's finish the job and go."

"Yeah," Micky Horan breathed. "Me too."

"Start the car if you're nervous," Big Jake growled. "Warm her up good. By the time you come back the job'll be done. Dig, damn you!" he snarled at Link.

Micky Horan flitted past them like an evil shadow. Link heard him go up the stairs, breathing hard.

The woman, Babe, was armed too. The flat, black automatic looked fantastic in her doeskin gloves.

Link dug, but he didn't dig fast. Not even when the shotgun that Big Jake held prodded him. He was thinking, weighing his chances—the kids' chances—old Pop Nason's chances—in the overloaded scales.

Hell! They were all doomed anyway! He might as well take the millionth chance, win or lose. You weren't licked while that remained. . . .

He looked furtively down at Jake's well-shod feet.

He groaned, thrust the spade weakly into the loam, lurched sidewise, clutching his raw, burned hand that had taken so much punishment.

"I'm through, damn you," he muttered, with a sob in his voice. "Dig with this hand of mine? Nuts to you, Jake!" It was the hysterical groan of a man tormented beyond endurance.

"Softie, huh?" Jake jeered. "Why, you. . . ."

HE TOOK one step forward—and as he did, lifting the death-dealing threat of the shotgun, Link took that millionth chance. He brought his heel down on that still trailing shoestrings, thrust out an elbow.

The woman screamed horribly as Big Jake toppled with an oath. He tried to jerk himself back, but he couldn't. He fell headlong into the four-foot grave, and didn't release his clenched hold upon the shotgun.

That was very unfortunate indeed for Big Jake. For in falling, his finger clutched instinctively on the trigger, and the low-ceilinged cellar was filled with thunder and cordite.

Link didn't stop to look at what had been Big Jake Schiff. Not then. It wouldn't have been very pleasant, anyway. There wasn't much of Big Jake's flat, pale face and bullet head left.

Link flung himself forward upon the woman, who was still frozen with horror. He knocked the automatic from her hand as it spoke, planted his fist square against her jaw. She went down like a sack of meal, and Link groped for and found her gun, despite a shattered shoulder that had stopped her first bullet.

Micky Horan would be coming back any time now. He must have heard the shots—but they'd mean only one thing to him. Link looked at the kid from the orphanage. She was holding the whimpering baby tight in her arms, silent, hypnotized in horror.

"Put the baby down, Joey," he said. "Take this knife—cut those ropes off the sheriff's hands. Can you do that, kid? Sure you can, Joey!"

He wondered, briefly, how much hell she'd lived through, during the past weeks and months, to make an obedient little automaton of her. Plenty, he guessed. She scuttered past him like a mouse as the door at the top of the cellar steps opened.

The door was around the L of the cellar, and until Micky Horan got halfway down he couldn't see what had happened. And by then. . . .

"Okay, Jake?" he asked hoarsely. "All done?" His legs came into view.

"Okay," said Link, and he fired, ducking behind the ramp of soft earth.

The precaution wasn't necessary. Link Haley could score a hundred on any bull's-eye. And he'd done it now. Got the man who came hurtling down the stairs yelling, fair and square in the kneecap.

Five minutes later the ropes that had

bound him and Sheriff Nason were giving duty a second time on a bleeding, snarling little rat, a still groggy blonde. Big Jake Schiff didn't need any such attention. He still lay sprawled, very dead indeed and not to be looked at, in the grave he'd started to dig.

"Let's get the kids upstairs," Link said weakly, shifting little Bobby Lonergan clumsily to his other shoulder. The kid looked thin and sick and blue around the gills, but he must be all right, if he could yell like that!

Pop Nason had his arm about Mary Josephine's gaunt shoulders, as she stumbled up the cellar steps, still like a steep-walker.

She was hanging onto him as if she liked him pretty well.

In the warm, dirty kitchen, that seemed different now, Link settled her in the rocker by the stove.

She held out her arms for the Lonergan baby.

"He acts good with me," she said. "They all did—at the—the— orphanage."

She rocked him gravely, and he stopped yelling in pleased surprise, stuck a thumb into his mouth, and promptly went off to sleep.

Sheriff Nason was sputtering into the phone, calling troopers' headquarters. While he waited, he told Link how Micky Horan had got the drop on him, as he stopped on his way to Gilman Center, to reconnoitre all around the Mill Hollow house.

"Kinda worried about you, I was," he grunted. "Soon as that woman says no one 'suspicious lookin' " had been around. I figured they was jest playin' for time, an' had you hogtied. So I ease towards the barn to fix that big car o' theirs so they won't make no getaway if they have flim-flammed you . . . and bang! That's all I know until. . . ." He got his connection, piped a fervent summons into the mouth-piece.

Link, less white about the gills, decided his shoulder would keep.

He took the phone from Pop Nason, got the toll operator—Senator Lonergan had a private wire kept clear for just such news. It didn't take Link long to tell him that his grandson, and most of his hundred grand, were waiting for him.

"Yeah . . . yeah. Bobby's okay, thanks to a little girl the mob snatched six months back as a cover-up. Yeah, I'm telling you that she's been taking care of him. But going home, to her, means going back to an orphanage."

According to old Senator Lonergan, it didn't.

Link hung up as the state troopers' siren whined outside.

"You didn't like the orphanage much, did you, Joey?" he asked the little girl with the cropped head. "That's why you played you were a little boy and never let out a peep, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"They were nice, too, at first. Then they—weren't."

"I guess you don't have to go back to the orphanage, anyway," Link told her, blowing his nose. "I guess things are looking up for you, Joey. Like the idea of living in a big house in Boston, with everything pretty swell?"

Pop Nason snorted, on his way to the door, where a couple of state troopers pounded.

"I guess she's all fixed up already, if you want to know it!" he barked. "Wouldn't mind having a nice little gal around at all, my sister Nettie and I wouldn't! Jes' told her so, too. Nettie makes the best cinnamon cookies in the whole county, pretty near. . . ."

There was a lot of confusion in the kitchen just then.

Link, propped up against the wall, told the hard-bitten young sergeant to look in the cellar and take what he wanted.

Mary Josephine sat small and quiet in

the rocker. Her pale, freckled little face was the only thing that was very clear to him, above the bundle of sleeping Lonergan baby.

"Guess you can take your pick, Joey," he said.

Funny, how badly he wanted to see that kid smile, just once.

"I like cinnamon cookies," she breathed. "Lots!"

She smiled.



BEAUTIFUL, BLUE, and DEADLY!

By Burt Sims

With or without the luscious chick at the wheel, the convertible looked like a bargain. But all that Johnny Aiken was buying with his famous "highest prices"—was his own private hearse!

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THE TRAP

By
Philip Ketchum

There are some things a stool pigeon would rather not know about—such as the murder gun that Fenner's mysterious host had left him holding. . . .

It was early evening and the street was deserted. . . .

IT HAD been chilly and windy all day but with the coming of darkness it grew cold. Bitterly cold. Fenner pressed his body against the wall of a building in the alley between First and Second streets, the alley running from Tremont to Cordova. The thin coat he was wearing gave him only a slight protection from the icy fingers of the wind.

His feet were numb. He kept rubbing his hands together and blowing on them,

but it didn't seem to help, and shoving them into his pockets was no better. He had stopped thinking. When he had come here, half an hour before, he had been wondering what lay back of Cassidy's request, but it didn't seem important any more. Getting away was all that was important, now. Getting back to his room where he could crowd up to the gas heater and absorb its warmth.

Two men hurried past the alley entrance, their heads down, bucking the wind. They didn't slow down, didn't hesitate. It was eight o'clock, probably after eight. Fenner was sure of that. Cassidy had told him to be here at eight o'clock, sharp. Fenner wondered, dully, how much longer he was supposed to wait.

Another man passed the alley entrance. A man walking alone, stooped against the storm, heavily bundled up. His arm swung suddenly away from his body, tossing a package into the alley. Fenner caught only a faint glimpse of it. He heard it fall, marked the spot in his mind, glanced back toward Cordova street, then stepped forward. He found the package, scooped it up, tucked it under his arm and shuffled away, staying close to the buildings lining one side of the alley. When he reached Cordova he took a quick look up and down the street, but there was no one near. He turned up Cordova toward Second. He had eight blocks to walk, eight blocks to the place where he roomed.

Fenner hurried, keeping as close to the buildings as he could. He occasionally passed people going the other way, but he paid no attention to them. No more attention to them, probably, than they paid to him. A thin, stooped figure in an old coat a shapeless hat pulled low across his forehead, shielding most of his face from view.

When he got to Ward's Cigar store, he glanced through the window, but Frank Ward wasn't there. Sheppy was on duty, and there were no customers. Beyond Ward's, on the corner, was the Brass Rail

Tavern. Fenner knew he wasn't welcome in the Brass Rail, but he pushed open the door and stepped inside.

Red was behind the bar, talking to a man Fenner didn't know. There were two other customers, and at the far end of the room was Dan Showalter, who owned the place. Showalter was standing where the heat came out of the wall, rubbing his hands together. He was wearing his coat and hat.

Fenner noticed that Showalter glanced around at him. He was almost certain that Showalter noticed the package under his arm. Fenner moved to the bar.

"What'll it be, stoolie?" asked Red, scowling.

"Bourbon," said Fenner.

"Can you pay for it?"

Fenner dug a half dollar from his pocket. His fingers were so stiff he almost dropped it. In the back bar mirror he could see Showalter, watching him, but still standing back by the heat and rubbing his hands together.

"Drink it and beat it," said Red, setting the drink in front of him.

Red was a fat, cheerful man, but he took his cue as to his attitude toward Fenner from his boss.

Fenner took half his bourbon and let it burn down his throat and felt the spreading warmth of it through his body. The door opened and Frank Ward and Jim Hudson came in. They passed him with hardly a glance. Hudson called a greeting to Dan Showalter. Hudson was a gambler. Frank Ward ran a book at his cigar store but it was Hudson's book. Ward was just a front man with a percentage cut. Showalter joined Ward and Hudson at the far end of the bar.

"Finish your drink and beat it," growled Red.

Fenner finished his drink. He left the tavern, rounded the corner, came to the building where he lived, and climbed to his room.

It was half an hour later when he heard

footsteps in the hall and a knock on his door. Half an hour later but he was still cold, was still wearing his overcoat, and was still huddled over the gas heater.

"Fenner," called a voice in the hall. "Fenner. Come on. Open up."

Fenner didn't recognize the voice. He couldn't imagine who would be calling on him. A sudden apprehension gripped him. He glanced toward the chest of drawers against the far wall. The package he had picked up in the alley he had placed in the bottom drawer, under some dirty clothing. He had placed it there temporarily. Cassidy had asked him if he could hide it somewhere and he had said he could. There was a loose floor board under his bed and a hiding place below it, but he hadn't yet taken the time to put the package there.

"Open up, Fenner," said the voice in the hall. "I haven't got all night."

There was something ugly in the sound of that voice. Fenner gulped. He pulled off his overcoat and hung it up. He took off his suit coat and threw it on the bed, then lifted a blanket and draped it over his shoulders. The door started rattling.

"I'm coming," said Fenner. "Just a minute."

He crossed to the door, unlocked it, opened it and stepped back. It was Bill Sprague who entered. Detective Bill Sprague. Fenner had never had much contact with Sprague. He had hoped he never would. He had a feeling Sprague was a man to be avoided, even by a stoolie. Why he felt that way, he wasn't sure. Perhaps it was something in the hard and steady look in Sprague's eyes which had warned him away from the man.

"What do you want?" he mumbled. "What have I done?"

"Where have you been tonight?" asked Sprague bluntly.

"Nowhere," said Fenner. "Nowhere but to the corner for a drink a few minutes ago. Do I look crazy? Would I go out on a night like this? I'm half frozen now."

Sprague unbuttoned his coat. It was a good coat, Fenner noticed. A thick coat. A coat which would keep out the cold. Fenner pulled his blanket more tightly around his shoulders.

"Where were you at eight o'clock?" asked Sprague.

"Here," said Fenner.

Sprague nodded. "You'd better be able to prove it. At a few minutes before eight, someone jumped out from an alley—shot and killed Max Rosen. Shot him, on the deserted street, near First and Morrison. Did you hear that? Someone shot and killed Max Rosen, as fine a detective as ever wore a badge."

Sprague's voice had lifted. Anger showed in his eyes, a blazing anger which made Fenner back up a step.

"You knew Max Rosen," Sprague thundered. "You had a run-in with him awhile back. If I thought you'd had anything to do with killing him, I'd tear you to pieces, right now."

Fenner had stepped back again but Sprague had followed him, and now reached out and grabbed him by the arms. Fenner could feel the detective's fingers even through the blanket. He winced from the pain and Sprague shoved him away: Shoved him so hard he fell across the bed and then lay there looking up at the man.

"Maybe I ought to haul you in, just on general principles," Sprague was saying, "but some of the boys around headquarters think you're pretty smart, Fenner. They think you know your way around. They think you can dig up stuff. Well, I'm going to give you a chance. Do you know what you're going to do?"

Fenner said nothing. He didn't even shake his head.

"You're going to dig up a name," said Sprague. "The name of the man who killed Max Rosen."

"I'll—I'll do what I can," Fenner whispered.

"You'll do better than that," said Sprague. "You'll dig up a name or you're finished, Fenner. I'll see to that myself."

Sprague wasn't shouting now. His voice was lower but the hard edge was still there. He stood above Fenner, staring down at him, his lower jaw shoved out, his lips tight and thin, anger still in his eyes.

"I'll—do what I can," said Fenner again.

Sprague jerked around. He crossed to the door and stood there for a moment, buttoning up his coat, and looking back.

"Tomorrow night," he said bluntly. "You've got until tomorrow night, Fenner. I want a name. Get it."

FENNER locked the door after the detective left, and suddenly was again aware of the cold. He moved to the gas heater and stood above it, warming his hands. Thin hands, bony, not very clean, not very steady. Never very steady. In the mirror on the wall he could see the reflection of his face. A face like his hands. Thin, bony, not too clean. But Fenner didn't often examine his face in the mirror, and he didn't now. A frightening thought had come to him. Rosen had been shot near First and Morrison, not three blocks from where he, Fenner, had waited for the package for Cassidy. Rosen had been shot a few minutes before eight. At a few minutes after eight, a package had been tossed to Fenner's feet.

Fenner made sure of the lock on the door, then crossed to the chest of drawers and took out the package he had hidden. He unwrapped it, then caught his breath. He was staring at a gun and a wallet. The gun which had been used to kill Rosen. He couldn't be sure of that, but it was a good guess. And the wallet? Fenner used a pencil to open it, not wanting to get his fingerprints on it. The wallet was Rosen's.

Fenner had forgotten he was cold. His mind was working swiftly. There was one positive assumption with which he could start. Cassidy had been responsible for the

murder of Rosen, for Cassidy had sent him to pick up the package he had just opened, the package with Rosen's wallet and the gun used in the killing. And from here, there were two possibilities. One, that Cassidy for some reason or other had wanted the gun and wallet hidden for a while. Or a second possibility, that Cassidy had expected the police to find the gun and wallet here. That Cassidy was framing him. And it could be a solid frame. He had no alibi for tonight. He had been near the scene of the crime. The gun and Rosen's wallet were in his possession. As for Cassidy, the police would never believe Fenner's story about him. There was no way to identify Cassidy. He was a voice on the other end of a telephone connection, and nothing more. Nothing tangible.

Fenner recalled the first contact he had had with Cassidy, almost a year before. He had dropped into Ward's cigar store and Frank Ward had handed him a note, saying, "Here's a telephone message I took for you, Fenner. The call came about an hour ago."

The message had read, *Telephone me at three-thirty this afternoon at Crenshaw 25464. Cassidy.*

Fenner hadn't known anyone by that name. He had been puzzled, but had made the call. Cassidy had asked him to go to a certain bar, uptown, where a man would give him an envelope. The envelope was to be delivered to another man who would ask for it, in another bar. "I'll mail you your fee," Cassidy had told him. "If you handle this right, I may use you again."

The possibilities in this had been intriguing. Fenner had gone to the uptown bar and had received an envelope from a man he didn't know but who apparently knew him. He had meant to look at the envelope's contents but the envelope had been tightly sealed with wax. He had delivered it to another man he didn't know, but who seemed to know him, and two days later, through the mail, he had re-

ceived five ten dollar bills. Fifty dollars for messenger work. Not bad.

Within a month he had had another message from Cassidy. There had been a package to pick up at a waterfront hotel and to deliver across town. This had brought him a hundred dollars through the mail. "Men who work for me, and who don't pry or ask questions, and who don't talk, get paid quite well," Cassidy had said over the telephone. "Watch your step, Fenner. Don't slip."

There had been other jobs to be handled. It had been easy money, and someday, Fenner had thought, it might lead to real money. Someday he would run into something which would really pay off. That chance had been in the back of his mind, always. But not a payoff like this. Not a murder rap.

From under a can on the top shelf of the cupboard, Fenner took a slip of paper. On it were listed a dozen telephone numbers, all different. This was his record of the numbers at which he had telephoned Cassidy. Five of the numbers were checked. Five he had identified as telephone booth numbers, right in this area. Cassidy had sent him a number to call, had specified the time, and had waited at the booth for his call.

The other numbers might be telephone booth numbers, too, or they might not be. The others Fenner hadn't identified even though he had gone through the telephone book, looking for them. And there was no value in those he had identified, excepting for this. All numbers identified were of booths in this immediate area. Booths close to the Brass Rail Tavern. Booths handy to Dan Showalter, among other people.

Fenner scowled. "Showalter," he said under his breath. "It's got to be Showalter. Cassidy is Showalter."

He had been of that opinion for a long time. He was fairly sure that some of the packages he had picked up and delivered for Cassidy had held dope and he had seen

Showalter several times in conference with men he knew to be runners. Showalter drove a big car. He occasionally sat in a poker game with Jim Hudson and such games were never for peanuts. Showalter obviously had money. More money than he took in at the Brass Rail.

But it was still just a guess and Fenner was afraid the time he had left for guessing was running out. If there should be a tip to the police that he had murdered Rosen and if the police caught him with the gun and Rosen's wallet, the jaws of the trap would close.

Fenner put on his coat and overcoat again. He wrapped the gun in a handkerchief and dropped it into the overcoat pocket. The wallet, wrapped in another handkerchief, followed. After that he turned off the gas heater, put on his hat and turned to the door. He couldn't stay here and wait for the police. He had to get out. Out into the cold again. He had to get rid of the gun and wallet in such a way that it could never be traced to him. But at the same time, he had to play it smart, just in case Cassidy was on the level. He might want to be able to find the gun and wallet.

THERE was a back door, opening on the alley. Fenner used it, and outside, huddled for a few moments in the alley's shadows, staring toward the street, he could see lights in the apartment above Ward's Cigar store, where Frank Ward lived. Ward had apparently gone home. There might be a game going on up there. Sometimes there was. But not a big game. Hudson wouldn't be there, or Dan Showalter. Hudson? Fenner considered the man for a moment, then shook his head. Hudson was a gambler. He had several other bookie spots besides Ward's. There wasn't much chance that Hudson and Cassidy could be the same person. Or Ward, either, for that matter. Ward wasn't big enough. He was just a front man. .

The icy wind whistled down the alley. Fenner shivered. He pulled his coat together at the throat and edged toward the street. It wasn't late, but there still wasn't anyone in sight. And there weren't many cars passing up and down the street. The cold had driven most people indoors. Ward had closed his cigar store early, but the Brass Rail Tavern was still open, and after a moment, Fenner moved that way.

Red scowled at him as he came in, left the two men he had been talking to, and moved to the front end of the bar. "What do you want, Fenner?" he growled.

"Where's Dan Showalter?" asked Fenner.

"He's gone home."

Fenner had no idea where Showalter lived. It had never occurred to him to wonder about where Showalter lived. Most of the day he seemed to hang around the tavern, occasionally taking Red's place at the bar. Sometimes he drove off somewhere in his car.

"Where could I find him?" he asked, slowly.

"Here, tomorrow," said Red. "If there's any reason you've got to see him."

"But where could I see him tonight?"

Red shrugged his shoulders. "How should I know? Take a tip from me, Fenner. The boss doesn't like guys like you. Keep away from him."

Fenner remembered how Showalter had glanced at the package under his arm earlier in the evening. Showalter had glanced at it as though expecting to see it there, but only Cassidy and the man who had tossed him the package should have been especially interested in it. And Cassidy and the man who had tossed him the package could be the same person. It was abruptly important to Fenner to see Showalter tonight.

"Tell me where he lives, Red," he asked again.

"I don't know where he lives," said Red. "He wouldn't want to be bothered with

you tonight, anyhow. What's eating you?"

"Have you got his telephone number?"

"No. Look here, Fenner. I'm busy. If you want a drink, order it, and then get out."

Fenner shook his head. He could see he wasn't going to get anywhere with Red. He turned to the door.

Outside, the icy fingers of the wind drove at him again as he turned down the street. He came to Ward's Cigar store and stopped for a moment, huddled in the scant protection of its entrance. A police car screamed down the street and pulled in to the curb in front of the Brass Rail Tavern. Four men got out and hurried inside. Fenner took a deep breath. He had left the tavern just in time. If he had been there when the police arrived he might have been arrested, might have been searched. Until they got the man who had killed Rosen, the police were going to be pretty tough on everyone. In fact, it might be a good idea to get off the street. Red might mention that he had just left the tavern.

It was only a step to the doorway which led to the apartment above the cigar store where Frank Ward lived. Fenner moved that way. He found the buzzer, and pushed it, and while he waited for the answering click it occurred to him that Frank Ward might be able to tell him where Showalter lived. Ward would know. And Ward had always been friendly, not minding the bother of passing on the infrequent messages from Cassidy. Once Ward had said to him in a mildly curious way, "Who is this Cassidy, anyhow?" And when Fenner had answered that he was just a friend, Ward had said, "Bring him around sometime. I could use a few more customers."

There was a clicking sound at the door as Ward released the lock. Fenner pushed the door open, stepped inside, and started up the stairs. Ward appeared at the top. A short man, bald, middle-aged, wearing thick glasses. He seemed surprised to see Fenner.

"You?" he said, frowning. "What's wrong, Fenner?"

"Max Rosen was killed a couple hours ago," said Fenner. "Hadn't you heard about it?"

"Max Rosen?" gasped Ward. "The cop?"

"Someone plugged him—jumped out from an alley near First and Morrison."

"Who?"

"How should I know?" said Fenner.

He reached the top of the stairs and Ward stepped away, pulling off his glasses, reaching for a handkerchief to clean them, then putting them back on again.

"This is terrible," he muttered. "Terrible. Max was a fine man, for a cop. He never gave any of us any trouble. Right in there, Fenner."

He indicated an open door. Fenner stepped through it into the parlor. A big room, nicely furnished. Fenner noticed the round card table, the desk, and the wall heater. He moved toward the heater.

"Sprague came to see me," he mentioned. "Sprague seemed to think I could tell him something. I'm supposed to pass on a lot of stuff to the cops. I don't. But this time, if I could, I would."

"Yeah," said Ward. "Yeah, I know what you mean. Would you like a cigar, Fenner. There's some in that box on the desk."

This was a little surprising. It wasn't often that Fenner was offered a cigar. He crossed to the desk, reached toward the cigar box, and opened it.

"You thought maybe I might have some idea about who shot Rosen?" asked Ward. "Is that why you came here?"

"No," said Fenner. "It was something else. I thought you might be able to tell me where Showalter lived."

HE TOOK a cigar from the box and as he did so he noticed the telephone on the desk, and the number on the dial plate. Whenever Fenner saw a telephone, he read

the number. It had become a habit, growing out of his search for some clue as to the identity of Cassidy. The number on this telephone was Crestview 28620. *Crestview 28620!*

Fenner's body went rigid. He couldn't help it. He knew the number. It was one of the numbers on his list. One of the numbers at which he had called Cassidy. There could be no question of it. Although he had kept a list of the numbers, he knew them by heart. He had telephoned Cassidy at Crestview 28620, only two months ago. He had telephoned Cassidy, here.

"What do you want with Showalter?" Ward was asking.

Fenner shrugged his shoulders. He turned around. He bit the end off his cigar. "Just something personal," he muttered. "I wanted to look him up tonight, if I could."

"I didn't know you and Showalter were that close," said Ward.

He was staring at Fenner through his thick glasses, glasses which magnified his eyes, made them seem to be popping out of his skull.

"I just wanted to see him," Fenner mumbled.

He was trying, trying desperately, to readjust his thinking to what he had just discovered. He had been wrong about Showalter. It was Ward who was Cassidy. Ward the front man, who was more than a front man. And of course Ward hadn't minded passing on Cassidy's messages, for all he had to do was write them. He could get away from his store any time he wanted to for a short trip to some telephone booth near by. He had a man working for him who could watch the store. But two months ago when he had used the telephone here, Sheppy, who worked for him, had been ill. Fenner remembered it, for he had asked for Sheppy's job. Two months ago, Ward had risked using the telephone above his store.

"Showalter lives miles from here," Ward was saying. "It's a bad night. If I were

you, I'd let it go over until tomorrow."

"I sort of wanted to see him," said Fenner vaguely.

Ward took off his glasses. He polished them again, put them back on, and peered through them at Fenner. "Did you stop in the store tonight?" he asked suddenly. "Did you see Sheppy?"

Fenner shook his head.

"Then you didn't get the message. Sheppy had a message for you. It was from this man Cassidy. He said he was coming by to see you tonight, at ten-thirty or eleven."

"Tonight?" said Fenner.

"That was the message, I'm sure, It's after ten now, Fenner."

"So maybe I'd better get home."

"If you want to be there when he gets there."

Fenner reached into his pocket for matches to light his cigar. He felt the bulk of the gun and Rosen's wallet. He nodded his head, but he was sure now. Sure that Ward was Cassidy. The message Ward had given him was too pat to be real. Too convenient. It would send him home. A telephone tip-off to the police would bring them, and not Cassidy, to his room. Perhaps the call had already been made. The jaws of the trap were closing.

The door buzzer sounded. Fenner's body jerked. The match he had struck flickered out. He lit another match.

"Yeah, you'd better be going," said Ward. "You'll miss your friend if you don't. Let Showalter go until tomorrow."

"Sure," said Fenner. "Sure. Just let me get warm first."

He started toward the wall heater, holding his hands out toward it. Ward hesitated, then turned to the door, pressed a button to release the lock below, and

stepped into the hall to see who was coming.

The minute he left the room Fenner hurried back to the desk. He pulled open the top drawer, took the wrapped gun from his pocket, and rolled the gun out of it. He shoved it far back in the drawer. The wallet he put into another drawer, deep out of sight. Voices reached in from the hall, but who was out there with Ward, he didn't know. He hurried back to the heater and was standing there, soaking up its warmth, when Ward came back into the room alone.

"That was Doc Wycroft," said Ward. "He thought there was a game here tonight. We had planned one, but it fell through."

"I guess I ought to be going," said Fenner.

Ward stared at him, frowning. The eyes behind the thick glasses were steady, hard. Fenner was suddenly nervous. He wanted to get out of here quickly, while he could, before Ward might get suspicious.

"I guess I ought to be going," he said again.

"Yeah," said Ward. "Yeah. You don't have much time."

OUTSIDE, Fenner hurried to the alley, and down the alley toward the back of the house where he roomed. He made it and reached for the knob. Suddenly from the shadows, arms stretched out and grabbed him and twisted him around. He heard a voice, Sprague's voice, growling, "Where have you been, Fenner? Start talking."

Fenner might not have tried to jerk free if he hadn't been so surprised, but he made the effort, stabbing blindly at Sprague's

FOUR ALARM CRIME

Haled into court for turning in a false alarm, a Washington, D. C., nurse's aide explained that things had become boring at the hospital; she was lonely and wanted some excitement.

—Harold Helfer

face. A jolting fist knocked him down, then Sprague leaned over and pulled him erect and shook him.

"Start talking, Fenner," the detective shouted. "Where have you been?"

There were other men here with Sprague Fenner could see their shadowy figures. He tried to whip his thoughts into order. "You wanted a name," he mumbled. "You said you wanted a name."

"You bet your life I want a name," said the detective. "We got a name in a blind tip over, the telephone. Your name. We were told we would find something in your room, but your room's clean. Where have you been?"

"To the tavern on the corner," said Fenner. "I wanted to see Showalter. I thought I might get something from him, but he wasn't in. I started looking for Jim Hudson."

"Keep talking," said Sprague.

Hands were patting Fenner's clothing, searching him, but Fenner paid no attention. He said, "Here's the name, Sprague. Frank Ward."

"Ward?"

"Yes, Frank Ward. You searched my place. Search his. Get the records of his dope. . . ."

Fenner stopped suddenly, as though he had said too much, as though he had spilled something he had meant to keep hidden.

"Dope, huh?" said Sprague. "Rosen was working on a dope ring angle. Maybe you've got something, Fenner. Maybe Ward is more than just a bookie. We'll have a talk with him. Sam, you stick here with Fenner. Take him up to his room. The rest of us will drop in on Ward."

Fenner and the detective named Sam went on inside and up to Fenner's room. Fenner turned on the gas heater. He stood over it, trying to get warm. The detective paced the room, now and then muttering under his breath and scowling at Fenner as though resenting the job he had been given.

After a time another detective showed up.

"We're to take Fenner down to headquarters," he announced. "Sprague wants to talk to him again."

"What did you draw at Ward's?" asked Sam. "A blank?"

"Not at all," said the man who had just arrived. "We found the gun used to kill Rosen. Or at least we think it was the gun. And we found Rosen's wallet. Besides that we stumbled across a cache of dope and a record book with names and addresses which will smash the entire ring. It was quite a haul. Ward claims that the gun and wallet were planted in his place by Fenner, but the story's pretty thin. Ward is the man Rosen was after. We're sure of that, now. Ward had the best motive for murder. Rosen was getting close to him."

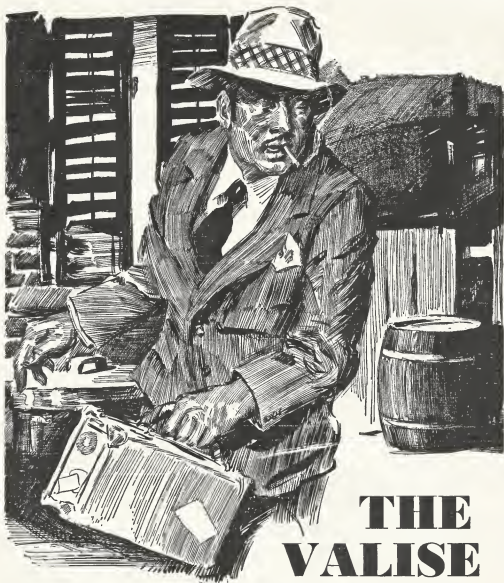
"Maybe Ward hired Fenner to kill Rosen," Sam suggested.

"Hired that shivering guy?" said the other detective, pointing to Fenner. "Not a chance of it. But Sprague still wants to talk to him. Come on, Fenner. We've got steam heat at headquarters. It's quite comfortable."

"Can I stay all night?" asked Fenner. "This room never gets warm. I've been thinking about going to Florida."

"Now there's an idea," said the detective, chuckling.

And it was an idea, Fenner decided. Of course if he went to Florida he might have to go to work. But at least it was warm down there. Warm and comfortable all year around. Florida. That was the place to go. Florida, where a guy didn't half freeze to death in the winter. The police here didn't have a thing on him. Ward's word against his wouldn't stand up in view of the dope angle. He was a stoolie. He was supposed to know things. He didn't have to explain how he knew things. Sprague could be hard on him, but after Sprague—Florida. It was something to look forward to.



THE VALISE

By Rufus Bakalor

Little Dipper moved quickly. . . .

*It was the ancient switcheroo . . .
but if you live long enough you'll
find, like Little Dipper, that new
wine can sometimes find its way
into old bottles!*

IN THE grift, it was said of Little Dipper that he had a nose like a divining rod when it came to locating other people's money in an accessible place.

Now, sitting in a coach of The Windy City Limited, Little Dipper's nose twitched with excitement as he picked up the scent of a sizeable assembly of money in the seat

just ahead of him. The money was in a new, fiberboard valise, and the valise was on the lap of a little old man who frequently exchanged glances of mute understanding with his companion, an old woman. The old couple was clearly unused to travel; and it was equally clear that they were taking all their belongings with them in an odd assortment of bags, boxes, and cheap suitcases.

The old man had been sitting with his gnarled hands over the valise since they boarded the train, and, once, when he had gone to the washroom, he had taken the valise with him.

Although he did not understand the foreign language the old couple spoke sparingly, Little Dipper listened to them attentively, and, occasionally, he was rewarded with an English word, as when the old woman said, "Bank?" and the old man had replied, depreciatingly, "Eh, bank!"

When the other passengers began straggling to the dining car, the old woman took a loaf of dark bread and a wedge of cheese from a grocery bag and cut a portion of each for her husband and herself.

Eagerly, Little Dipper leaned forward until his chin was resting on the back of their seat. "If you folks'd like to go to the diner, I'll be more than happy to keep an eye on your things for you."

The old couple smiled at him with embarrassment.

"No, we eat here," said the old woman.

The woman said happily, "We go Fairbanks, Alaska. Live by daughter and husband."

"Is quite a ways," said Little Dipper. "Is far. How you go?"

"Oh, we take boat in Seattle, Washington, to Seward, Alaska. Then go train to Fairbanks, Alaska," said the old man.

"You go live in Alaska permanent? For always, I mean?"

The old couple nodded.

"You sell farm and go for good, huh?"

They acknowledged his comprehension

with a shake of their heads and, unwittingly, both looked at the valise on the old man's lap.

Little Dipper, who had been bound for the pockets at the midwestern fairs, saw his chance to lay a little groundwork. "Well, talk about small world! Me go Alaska, too."

They looked at him dumbly.

"Uncle leave me gold mine in Alaska," Little Dipper explained. "Yukon, Alaska. Me on way to Seattle now, too."

The old couple smiled at each other. "Is nice," the old woman said. "Mister go Alaska, too."

The old man said nothing, but tightened his hold on the valise.

Little Dipper rose. "Well, me go eat now. See you around, good people."

IN THE dining car, Little Dipper thought it over. And it took some profound thinking on his part. He was one for a quick pocket-picking of the "it's yours—switch—it's mine" school; but the heist of the valise looked like it might be a protracted affair. If one of the old couple stayed awake nights to stand guard over the valise, as seemed likely, he might have to follow them all the way to Alaska for just the proper moment to snatch it.

There was a stopover, probably a station change, in Chicago and, in that time, Little Dipper could pick up a cheap valise just like the old couple's. Fill it with newspapers or something. Eventually, of course, the old couple's joint vigilance of their valise would relax for a moment and Little Dipper would be all set to pull a switch.

The plan was simple, sound, and likely to succeed, for Little Dipper was an artist at such a maneuver. Only one difficulty remained—money. He had only enough money to get him to the fairs and surely not enough to see him through the long journey that probably lay ahead. There were pockets begging to be picked on the train, and ordinarily Little Dipper would

have set to work with a will. But now he didn't want to risk getting caught and losing his chance at the larger loot.

Frowning, he made his way to the club car to brood over his financial position.

The solution to his problem sat in a pin-stripe suit and Tattersall vest rubbing his finger slowly along his thin mustache. It was Danny Wink, a gambler of moderate success. He shot Little Dipper a smile of recognition, shifted his wallet to a pocket inside his vest, and extended his hand.

Little Dipper took the chair next to Danny Wink's, and they exchanged bromides and amenities while Little Dipper allowed a decent interval to pass before making his touch.

And while Little Dipper and Danny Wink are chatting amiably, I would like to have a stern word with the reader, who has been harboring grave suspicions about the contents of the old man's valise. Full of money, my eye, he has been thinking, in the anticipatory way readers have. More than likely, it's full of dark bread and cheese, or something of equivalent value; so there's another plot all figured out. Therefore, at this point, let me state unequivocally that the valise on the old man's lap was crammed full of bona-fide United States Treasury certificates. Perhaps I had best even mention the exact amount: \$23,-812.00, same representing the life savings of the old couple. So let's stop trying to outfox one another and get along with the story.

"Five hundred bucks?" Danny Wink said with mock horror. "Right now, I ain't got that kind of dough, Dipper. I had a run of bad luck in the big town."

"Let me have five hunnert now and I'll pay you back two grand in three weeks at the most. That's three hunnert percent. Chase National never had it so good."

"You must be on the trail of something very, very good."

"Ast me no questions, I'll tell you no lies."

"I got a right to ask some questions, like, for instance, what happens to my dough if your setup curdles?"

"It can't curdle. If there ever was a lead pipe cinch, this here's the baby."

"Maybe we could team up for the deal. . . ." Danny Wink suggested.

"Uh-uh. This is my chicken. Like Caesar said, I found it; I figured it; and I'll do it. It's strictly for one operator: namely, Little Dipper."



THE LOOK THAT KILLS!

Smashing Murder Saga

By Dean Evans

When the body was tossed from the speeding car, Haynes made his first mistake—in noticing it. His second was telling the cops. But his third—and almost fatal error—was in planning to stay alive!

Plus stories by all your favorite crime-mystery authors—all in the big October issue of . . .

DETECTIVE TALES

25c

Don't Miss it! On Sale July 18th!

"Where do you pay off? Here on the train?"

"Maybe, maybe not. That's why I need the expense money. It might take awhile. Maybe Seattle, maybe Alaska. Who knows?"

"Well, how'll you pay off?" said Danny Wink. "I change at Chicago for L.A."

"When this deal goes through, I think I'll take a vacation in L.A. myself. I'll look you up."

"You know it," said Danny Wink darkly.

They went to the vestibule between cars and Danny Wink counted out five hundred dollars. "Remember, you borrowed this, Dipper; you didn't steal it."

"Yeah, yeah, I know it."

"You better know it."

LITTLE DIPPER kept to his seat and was watchful the rest of the way to Chicago. So was the old man. He still kept the valise on his lap and, when he went to the washroom, took it with him. Little Dipper contented himself with consolidating his friendship with the old couple and biding his time.

When they arrived in Chicago, he checked on the Seattle train and, on his way to change stations, picked up a valise pretty much like the old man's. He bought his ticket to Seattle and then stood around on the platform until the old couple showed up.

When the old couple boarded the train, Little Dipper was right behind them, willing to be of help. But the old man declined. The old woman held the valise while her husband wrestled all their baggage on board. One of the bags swung back and threw Little Dipper off balance so that he fell back against the man behind him.

"Who ya pushing? Who ya pushing?" Little Dipper shouted over his shoulder. The man darted an angry glance at him and walked a short distance away.

There was something vaguely familiar

about the man Little Dipper had bumped into. He was clean-shaven, wore dark glasses, a hat with a wide, turned-down brim, and an ill-fitting topcoat with the collar turned up so that the size ticket was visible. But Little Dipper couldn't place him; he was too occupied with his own quarry. "You know it!", the man spat between his teeth.

Little Dipper once again managed to get the seat behind the old couple, and the man in the dark glasses took a seat at the rear of the coach they were in.

Then the watch was on. Little Dipper was watching the valise and Danny Wink was watching Little Dipper; and the train wasn't five hours out of Chicago before Danny had Little Dipper's project all figured out.

It began to look like everyone was Alaska-bound. The old couple hung on to that valise like it contained \$23,812.00, which, of course, it did. And, at night, it wasn't a matter of their taking turns watching it; they both stayed quietly awake, exasperatingly alert. Little Dipper knew, and Danny Wink, too. They stayed awake themselves most of the night and took their sleep in half hour snatches.

Let them good people stay up all night, thought Little Dipper. Sooner or later, it'll catch up with them; they got to drop off sometimes.

There was an eighteen hour wait in Seattle for the Alaska boat and the old couple sat it out on the pier, the old man with the valise on his lap.

Little Dipper tried to get them to go downtown and take in a movie. "Come on, I'll check your things for you. They'll be safe. We got eighteen hours before you can even get on the boat. Look. I'll treat. We go movie. I pay."

But the old couple only nodded and smiled while the old man said, "No, we stay here. No miss boat," and the old woman said, "You nice mister."

So Little Dipper hung around the dock

waiting for a chance that never came; and Danny Wink gravitated through the area at a respectful distance.

The old couple never left their cabin on the long, rough voyage to Seward. And that was agreeable to both Little Dipper and Danny Wink, who were deathly seasick in their respective cabins.

Little Dipper had dropped in on the old couple in their cabin just before the boat sailed and had found them as stoic and maladjusted as ever. They were sitting on the bunk wearing their life vests and the old man was holding the valise on his lap. A short time later, Danny Wink, who was now sporting a fake Vandyke beard and pince nez glasses, had seen Little Dipper try their cabin door and find it locked. So that was that until Seward.

By the time they docked at Seward, Little Dipper and Danny Wink were each growing very critical of their own wisdom. They were nearing the end of a long, tedious journey that had taken them thousands of miles and they were no nearer to possession of the valise in Seward than they had been in Philadelphia.

With blind doggedness, they boarded the Fairbanks train and surrendered themselves to the Alaska Railroad, Little Dipper close behind the old couple and Danny Wink bringing up the rear.

And then it happened. Just before the train pulled into Anchorage, the long-awaited moment came.

The old woman proclaimed with insistent snores that she was sound asleep; and the old man had gone to the wash room and, this time, had forgotten to take the valise with him.

Little Dipper moved quickly and deftly. He substituted his valise for the old man's and, in a moment, was in the next coach, ready to debark at Anchorage.

The valise was heavy and Little Dipper was weary, but he walked with a light step through the streets of Anchorage. The prize was his at last, and nothing remained

but the counting of it and his return to the States.

Perhaps Little Dipper could have been more discriminating in his choice of a bar in which to have a couple of drinks of triumph. A bar, for example, in which the barkeeper, for a hastily passed sawbuck, a mumbled word, will put a knockout drop in a customer's drink.

That is how the valise eventually wound up in the hands of Danny Wink, who at this point was wearing long sideburns, a heavy mustache, and a foolish grin. He picked the valise up from the side of Little Dipper's bar stool, left hastily, and was never heard of again.

In mellow moments, Little Dipper will tell the story of how he was criminally deprived of the valise full of money that he had gone to such length to steal. "Must of had a hunnert thousand smackeroots in it," he will lament. "Maybe more."

As for the old couple, they are living happily in Fairbanks. And Little Dipper and Danny Wink are responsible for the only really exciting thing that has happened to them in their lives. Their daughter and son-in-law have heard the story so often that they refuse to listen to it any more; but the old couple are content to relate it to each other.

The old man will begin, laying his finger alongside his nose, "It is easy to see the mister know we got money in suitcase. He will steal it. This anyone can see. I see. You see. So we do not have trouble, it is better he should steal it easy. But not right away."

And they tell each other of how, on the train, while the mister was sleeping, they had transferred the money from their valise to the one the mister had brought on the train at Chicago.

"Then we leave our suitcase full of newspaper for the mister to steal," the old woman will conclude, barely able to speak for laughing, "and the mister leave us *his* suitcase full of *our* money!" ■ ■ ■

STRANGE TRAILS



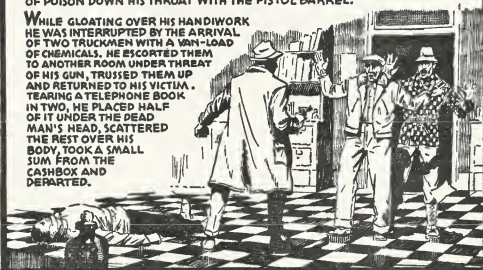
Murder for Pleasure

"TEXAS JIM" BAKERIEN BELIEVED THE WAY TO COMMIT THE PERFECT MURDER WAS TO SLIP UP TO SOMEONE HE'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE, KILL HIM, AND GO QUIETLY AWAY--WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT HE DID LATE ONE NIGHT IN DECEMBER 1928. HE HAD USED THIS *MODUS OPERANDI* SUCCESSFULLY BEFORE, AND INTENDED TO AGAIN.

TEX, A FORMER SAILOR WHO FANCIED HIMSELF A STRONG MAN AND AUTHORITY ON POISONS, CHOSE THE GUGGENHEIM LABORATORY ON NEW YORK'S WEST SIDE, FROM WHICH HE HAD BEEN RECENTLY DISCHARGED AS THE SCENE OF HIS LATEST MURDER.

ADMITTED AT GUNPOINT BY HENRY GAW, A CHEMIST WORKING LATE, BAKERIEN MADE SEVERAL FUTILE ATTEMPTS TO ADMINISTER CYANIDE TO GAW IN CUPS OF COFFEE. THEN, HOLDING THE CHEMIST ON THE FLOOR, HE FORCED A LUMP OF POISON DOWN HIS THROAT WITH THE PISTOL BARREL.

WHILE GLOATING OVER HIS HANDIWORK HE WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE ARRIVAL OF TWO TRUCKMEN WITH A VAN-LOAD OF CHEMICALS. HE ESCORTED THEM TO ANOTHER ROOM UNDER THREAT OF HIS GUN, TRUSSED THEM UP AND RETURNED TO HIS VICTIM. TEARING A TELEPHONE BOOK IN TWO, HE PLACED HALF OF IT UNDER THE DEAD MAN'S HEAD, SCATTERED THE REST OVER HIS BODY, TOOK A SMALL SUM FROM THE CASHBOX AND DEPARTED.



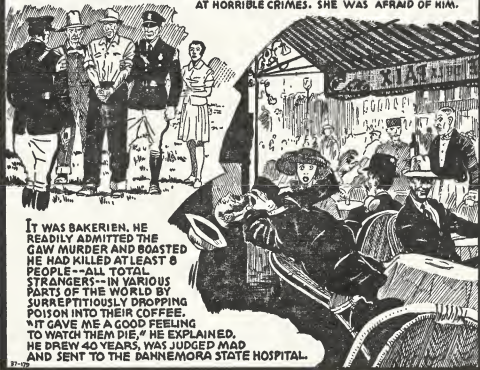
to MURDER

by
LEE

THE TRUCKERS RELEASED THEMSELVES AND CALLED POLICE. DETECTIVES RECOGNIZED THE WORK OF A VICIOUS MADMAN AND BEGAN CHECKING FORMER EMPLOYEES. WHEN THEY CAME TO BAKERIEN'S FURNISHED ROOM THEY FOUND POISON ENOUGH TO KILL A SMALL ARMY, AND EVIDENCE OF HURRIED DEPARTURE. THOUGH THEY TRACKED DOWN EVERY AVAILABLE CLUE AND SENT "WANTED" NOTICES ALL OVER THE WORLD, THE WEIRD KILLER HAD VANISHED.



BUT THEY WAITED, CONFIDENT HE WOULD BETRAY HIMSELF, AND IN 1930 THE DAUGHTER OF A MICHIGAN FARMER TOLD LOCAL POLICE THAT THEIR HIRED MAN WAS HINTING AT HORRIBLE CRIMES. SHE WAS AFRAID OF HIM.



IT WAS BAKERIEN. HE READILY ADMITTED THE GAW MURDER AND BOASTED HE HAD KILLED AT LEAST 8 PEOPLE--ALL TOTAL STRANGERS--IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE WORLD BY SURREPTITIOUSLY DROPPING POISON INTO THEIR COFFEE. "IT GAVE ME A GOOD FEELING TO WATCH THEM DIE," HE EXPLAINED. HE DREW 40 YEARS, WAS JUDGED MAD AND SENT TO THE DANNEMORA STATE HOSPITAL.

87-179



CRY MURDER!

Sometimes even a newspaper can become a deadly weapon against a killer, Augie, the police reporter, knew. But sometimes, too, as with other weapons, you have to guard against a deadly back-fire. . . .

THE room was dark. The woman sat sleeping in the wing chair, her fair hair disordered as her head slipped into the angle of the back and the wing. Even in repose, her ravaged face was like a carved stone mask of sorrow and despair. A glass stood on the table at her side. It contained the remains of a highball and three thoroughly dissolved sleeping powders. Her sleep was deep. It was becoming deeper.

A FAST-PACED CRIME-SUSPENSE NOVELETTE

By Larry Holden



*Ellen whimpered
with pain. . . .*

In the tiny kitchenette, the soft gas whispered from the four wide open, unlit burners of the cooking range. The oven door was down, and from that open mouth also came the whispering breath of death.

The woman slept, and by now her sleep

was too deep to be broken by the knock on her door. The knock was repeated and with quiet insistence a feminine voice called:

"Jessie. It's Ellen. Let me—"

The voice was cut off sharply, and it

would have taken ears more alert than those of the sleeping woman to have heard the scuffle of shoes in the corridor outside and the slight thud of a yielding body against the door.

In a moment, the silence was complete again, except in the kitchenette, where the soft gas whispered, Shhhh . . . as if protesting that unseemly disturbance in the presence of death.

* * *

Detective Lieutenant Burge stood beside the small white garage, his legs astride, his hands clasped behind him. His mouth was pursed up in a hard little bud of disbelief, and for the third time his eye measured the fifty yards between the garage and the bulk of the apartment house in the darkness. Ellen watched him angrily. She was mad clean through now, and even the memory of that brief terror seemed remote.

Pete Cameron gripped her arm and whispered, "Take it easy, honey."

She nodded once, but her lips remained compressed. Burge swung back to her. He thrust his hands into his pockets and jingled the loose change.

"Now, if I got this straight," he said, "here's what happened. The guy knocked you down in the apartment over there, carried you through the hall, down the stairs, all the way across that parking lot, then set you down here against the garage—and walked away. Right?" He cocked his eyebrow.

Steadied by Pete's hand on her arm, Ellen controlled her temper. "That's right," she said evenly. "I started to recover consciousness while I was lying here, and I felt his hands go around my neck. He was mumbling something to himself. Then he seemed to change his mind, and instead of choking me, he hit me again."

"Hm. Where'd he hit you?"

"On the left side of the neck."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot." His dry voice said patently that he hadn't forgotten. "That's why there wasn't a mark on you. He sounds like a considerate guy, in a way—not missing you up, I mean. And you do know what I mean, don't you, Miss Powers?"

"You mean I'm lying!" Ellen snapped.

Burge looked steadily at her, and she glared back at him.

If I weren't here, Pete thought, and if Augie weren't the *Herald* reporter, Burge'd be taking off the gloves just about now.

Despite his quiet manner, Detective Lieutenant Burge was also mad clear through. It showed in the angular set of his jaw and in the way he kept trying to goad Ellen out of her controlled calm.

Pete glanced quickly at the *Herald* reporter. Augie wasn't missing a blink. He was short, pink, bland and apple-cheeked, but his eyes were the gray of January ice. It wasn't because of his innocent-seeming smile that he had survived several changes of managing editors on his paper. Augie could smell a story in the egg and write it before it hatched. With Augie there, Burge would behave himself.

Augie looked wide-eyed at Burge and murmured, "it boils down to this, Lieutenant—was Jessie Sheridan bumped off or did she do a Dutch?"

Augie had been police reporter for ten years. He had certain privileges.

IT WAS Burge's turn to control himself.

The story, now three hours old, had reported Jessie Sheridan's death as suicide. Burge had been the assigned detective, and he had been satisfied with that verdict. It had been published, under banner headlines, in all the papers—for Jessie Sheridan had been notorious. She had been the discredited mother of one of the richest babies in the country. Burge was out on a limb.

Burge said grimly, "Jessie Sheridan

committed suicide. Even according to this girl's story," he pointed angrily at Ellen. "Just look at La Sheridan's past, and you've got the picture. Divorced by her husband because she associated with known criminals, her kid taken away from her and, on her husband's death, put under the guardianship of the Gordons."

Augie murmured provocatively, "I wouldn't call Leo Savoy a known criminal exactly."

"So he's never been convicted. So what?"

"So he's not a criminal. Ask Leo himself."

"Someday I will, and don't forget it. And I'll nail it on him, too. He's . . . but that's not the point," Burge refused to be drawn further. "The point is that the Sheridan woman has been brooding about her kid."

"She said they were killing her boy!" Ellen flashed belligerently. "She lived here just to be near him. She walked around the Gordon house every day, just watching and hoping for a glimpse of him. She even carried field glasses so she could watch his bedroom window, on the chance that she could see him. And she did see him. She must have. Because last night she was hysterical. I stayed with her all night, trying to calm her. They were killing her son, she said, and she was almost out of her mind."

Burge looked at Augie and shrugged. "You see?" he said. "Mentally deranged. Why should the Gordons kill her kid? They get fifty thousand a year to keep him alive. If the kid dies, there's a cousin that gets the money, and the Gordons are out. So why should they kill the kid?"

"You'd know," said Augie mildly, "if you ever had kids of your own. That's a backfire. Pay no attention to it. I see what you mean. But how about this cousin—Howard Sheridan, the guy that gets the millions? Maybe he could have been slipping a little cyanide in the oatmeal. Some

guys'd do anything for a million, y'know."

Burge said disgustedly, "Talk sense. We covered that angle, too. We're not dopes. Howard Sheridan could pay my salary, your salary, his salary and her salary, and not even have to give up cigarettes. And on top of that, he was in love with the dame. He thought his cousin gave her a raw deal, and he wanted her to marry him. We got a stack of letters from him out of her apartment. He's been writing her for the past two years."

"The impetuous type," sighed Augie. "Sweeps a girl off her feet with hot correspondence. But she still lived in a fifty-dollar-a-month walkup. One room and kitchenette. I remember Jessie's husband, another Sheridan. I covered the divorce. What'd his wife do to bring down a divorce on her head? She went to one of Leo Savoy's night clubs with a lush who proceeded to drink up the bar and lose his car keys. Leo, being a kind of gent, started to drive her home instead of tossing her in a cab—and on the way Leo was picked up by the law, for spitting on the sidewalk, I think. They never proved it. But Jessie Sheridan was with Leo. That was news. A socialite. If her husband had said tut-tut, it would have been squashed like that, but the louse never gave a peep, and she was crucified—associating with known criminals, I think you said, Mr. Burge?"

"Putting it that way," Burge said flatly, "I didn't say."

"But what do you say?"

Before Burge could reply, the plain-clothesman, who had been staring steadily at Ellen for the past hour, walked up to Burge, tapped him on the arm and opened a newspaper in front of him. He whispered, pointed and shrugged his shoulders.

Burge glanced up at Ellen and his eyes gleamed.

"Ellen Powers?" he asked softly.

She said, "Yes."

"The same Ellen Powers that's advertised here on the theatrical page as the

"Humming Bird of Leo Savoy's Bird Cage?"

Ellen flushed under his level gaze. She knew what was behind that gaze and she said defiantly, "That's right, but what has that—"

He interrupted derisively, "That's all, sister. That's all." He turned and grinned at Augie. "Does that answer your question? A dame out for publicity, trying to crash the headlines. The Humming Bird Of Leo Savoy's Bird Cage! Nuts. You can smell press agent from here to there."

Pete leaned forward and held up a finger. "Take her in, Burge," he said. "Throw her in the clink for obstructing justice."

"And you a lawyer!" Burge laughed. "She'd love that. And nuts to her. The only break I'd give that dame is a fracture." He chopped with the edge of his hand. "I'm ignoring her. I'm not giving her a line of publicity. Nothing." He looked at Ellen and said, "Nice try, sister," and walked toward the police car, followed by the detective who had showed him the theatrical page of the newspaper.

He didn't even look back, but his hard, narrow back showed contempt in every swing of the shoulders.

Pete shouted after him, "There's a murderer running around loose, Burge. What about that part of it?"

Burge did not answer, and a moment later the police car roared down the street.

Augie drawled, "Don't worry about that cop, Pete. He'll check it . . . whoops!" He glanced at his wrist watch. "I got a story to phone in, and if I can get it in within fifteen minutes, it'll be on the air." He took Ellen's arm and started her toward the apartment. "I'll use your phone, sweetheart, then you can ply me with liquor while we listen to the playback from WNCY."

The three of them went up to Ellen's apartment. She showed Augie the phone, then went into the kitchenette to make the drinks.

"But remember this," she called from the kitchenette doorway, "I'm mad, and I mean that, Augie. That policeman of yours made me mad." She looked mad. "So if you make any snide remarks in that story of yours, I swear you'll get a mickey."

By this time Augie had his city desk on the phone, and he flapped his hand at her. "Hi, Lloyd," he said, "here's an add on that Sheridan suicide. In a sensational statement to the police only a few minutes ago, Miss Ellen Powers—E-l-l-e-n P-o-w-e-r-s—revealed that while Jessie Sheridan was sitting in that chair of death, breathing in the lethal fumes, Miss Powers was beaten unconscious at the very door of the Sheridan apartment while attempting. . . ."

HIS voice hit into the story with staccato beats, subtly changing the fact of suicide into the hint of murder without actually saying so.

"Here's an interesting sidelight," he said in a dry voice. "Jessie has become a very popular girl down at the morgue. No less than three citizens have tried to claim the body—the cousin, Howard Sheridan; her son's guardians, the Gordons . . . and our old friend, Leo Savoy."

Ellen came in with three tall, clinking glasses. "Oh, she and Leo were very friendly," she said. "She had dinner with him once a week down at the Bird Cage."

"What?"

Ellen looked startled at Augie's vehemence. "Did I say something?" she asked, bewildered.

"Oh, no! Nothing at all, sweetheart—except one of the hottest angles of the whole story!"

Augie grabbed for the phone again. "Any other connection between her and Leo?" he demanded of Ellen.

"Well—about eight months ago, he asked all of us down at the Bird Cage to watch for an apartment for her. I heard him talking to her. He wanted to get something very swank for her, but she said,

'No, Leo, but thanks. You've done enough for me.'

"'For me' or 'to me'?"

"'For me.' That's what she said. I'm positive."

"Boyoboy," Augie muttered. He turned abruptly to the phone. He gave the news to the city desk. He looked up at Ellen again. "Know any more?"

"I don't know anything, Augie, honestly. He treated her with more respect than he treated anyone else, and he always wore a flower in his buttonhole and—" Then, with sudden misgivings, "Augie, I wish you wouldn't—"

He ignored that. "Making a play for her. Say, maybe there was something between them in the beginning when her husband divorced her and took the kid away! Listen, Lloyd," he snapped into the phone, "get out the files on the Sheridan divorce and custody cases."

Ellen looked at Pete in dismay and dropped onto the sofa. "Leo'll kill me for this," she wailed.

Pete said cheerfully, "And maybe he'll even fire you."

"Fire me! I'll never get another singing job as long as I live, if he has anything to do with it!"

"Wonderful. Now we can get married."

Ellen looked up at him. "He's going to be awful mad at me, Pete," she said soberly.

Augie interrupted. "Where's the radio? The story'll be on the air in five minutes. What's the matter, sweetheart, getting cold feet? If Leo had anything to do with Jessie's suicide, you wouldn't want him to get away with it, would you?"

Ellen compressed her lips and gave her head a short, decided shake. She pointed out the radio, and her finger trembled just a little. Augie trotted to the radio, and in five minutes the news came on with a dramatic rush.

Because of the haste in which it had been written, it was a little scrambled, but

three facts came out strongly, unmistakably—the fact that Ellen had been attacked; the fact that Jessie Sheridan had been hysterical because someone was killing her son; the fact "hinted" of the romance between Leo Savoy and the dead woman.

In a small voice, Ellen said, "It . . . sounds much worse over the radio."

"Oh, don't mind those announcers," Augie said brightly. "They get that way from having to read commercials. They make everything sound worse than it is."

But Ellen had been shaken and it showed in her eyes.

Pete said quickly, "I'll make some coffee."

He was only halfway across the room when the phone rang. Augie dived for it, yelling, "I'll take it!"

Pete caught him by the collar. "Let Ellen take it," he said sharply. "What do you want to do, put even her laundry bill on the front page?"

"Aw, Pete, suppose it's a new angle!"

"I'll give you a new angle, right on the side of the jaw. Let her answer her own calls."

But they both crowded close to her, listening to the tiny, whispered voice that came through the receiver.

It whispered, "Miss Ellen Powers?"

Augie made motions with his hands and silently framed the word, "Louder."

"I can't hear you," Ellen said into the phone. "Talk louder."

"Sorry, but I have a bad cold, Miss Powers. I represent the City News Service. Is it true that you were attacked and brutally beaten at Jessie Sheridan's door while she was committing suicide inside her apartment?"

"I—I have given my story to the police."

"Did you recognize your assailant, Miss Powers? Can you give me a description of him?"

Augie shook his head and Ellen said, "I have nothing to add to the story I have given the police."

"Is it true, Miss Powers, that you are about to take a trip to recover from your beating?"

"No, it is not!"

"Is it true, Miss Powers," the whisper intensified, "that you were offered ten thousand dollars to make that trip?"

Despite Augie's frantic motions, Ellen said angrily, "It certainly is not true!"

"Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money, Miss Powers. Or was it fifteen thousand dollars? That's even more."

Pete clenched her arm and whispered in her other ear, "Play along with him."

She nodded and said cautiously, "That is a lot of money."

"Yes it is, Miss Powers. I have information that it will be sent to you together with a steamship ticket if you consent to make the trip."

"But suppose I don't consent to make such a trip?"

"I have no information on that, Miss Powers. But it seems to me that if your assailant is a determined man, he will not take no for an answer. You really seem to be in a dangerous position. Do you wish to make a statement, Miss Powers?"

Augie started, "That guy—" and abruptly the phone was hung up at the other end, cutting the connection.

CHAPTER TWO

Run—or Die!

ELLEN looked whitely at Pete. Augie hit the side of his head with his fist.

"I'm a jackass," he groaned. "That was the guy. There is no City News Service. That was the guy, and he was offering fifteen thousand bucks for you to get out of town. What a story!"

Pete said grimly, "You write it, Augie, and I'll take you apart. That guy meant what he said."

"Sure, Pete. But if I break the story,

Ellen will get police protection and—"

Ellen broke in briskly, "I don't want police protection, and I think you're both being silly! If that was the man who hit me, he had a chance to—to do what he wanted to, and he didn't take it."

"Sure, sweetheart," said Augie eagerly. "But it's different now. At that time, he thought he was getting away with something. He was making Jessie Sheridan a suicide, and he didn't want any extra bodies lying around. But now it's beginning to break the other way, and he has to take chances. You need police protection. Right, Pete?"

"No, darn it," Ellen's eyes flashed angrily. "I'm not going to start hiding."

"And on top of that," Pete said, "If she doesn't make any more statements, he'll think he has her scared and—"

The phone rang again. Augie waved his hand.

"Answer it," he said morosely. "If some guy wants you to meet him in a dark alley, by all means accept the invitation."

Ellen said, "Bosh!" and picked up the phone.

It was Mrs. Alec Gordon, and Mrs. Alec Gordon was furious.

"I should have thought, Miss Powers," she said bitterly, "that if you had any comment to make on our care of the Sheridan child, you'd have verified your facts beforehand."

Her voice lashed through the phone, and Ellen could only stammer helplessly.

"Whatever caused you to make such a cruel, vicious accusation?" Mrs. Gordon was beginning to sound hysterical. "We love Donald. Why did you say such things?"

"But I didn't," said Ellen. "I didn't! That is, I didn't say them myself. It was Jessie Sheridan. She was hysterical. Possibly that accounts for—"

"Nothing can account for such a malicious attack—nothing. Mr. Gordon and I have done everything we humanly could

for the child. I demand that you come out here immediately. I demand that you see for yourself that we are not harming the child. I demand a public retraction of your statement. I demand it, Miss Powers!"

Ellen said quietly, "I'll be right out, Mrs. Gordon."

"I don't believe you. You're just saying that. I don't believe—"

They heard a heavy voice break in, "Now, now, Mrs. Gordon," and the phone rattled in its cradle as someone hung up.

Ellen hung up also and stood looking down at her hand. "The poor woman," she said. "She sounded frightened."

"Sure, scared they'll take the kid away from her," said Augie. "That kid gets fifty thousand a year for lollipops, and she controls all of it. If I stood to lose that much scratch, I'd be yelling, too."

Ellen turned away from him and picked up her coat from the arm of the sofa. "It's just possible that she does love the boy," she said shortly. "Coming with me, Pete?"

It was an unnecessary question, for Pete was already beside her. But Augie was at the door before them.

He said quickly, "I promise not to make any cracks. Okay, sweetheart?"

Ellen nodded, and they went downstairs to Augie's car. As they slid in, he mumbled, "Damn! I left my notes upstairs! I'll pick them up later."

It was a silent ride. Pete sat and watched Ellen's profile. It was still, but not composed. There was a telltale heaviness around the mouth. She had taken that first threatening phone call more seriously than she would have them believe. Her eyes were drawn, and her hands were clenched tightly in her lap. He put his arm around her and she gave him a quick, small smile.

The Sheridan home, in which the Gordons lived with the child, was an imposing white Georgian house that stood atop a tailored terrace. An eight-columned veranda ran across the entire front of the

house. The door was opened by a spare, round-shouldered man. He had wispy brown hair and a delicate face with a soft, pointed chin. He peered at Ellen.

"Miss Powers?" he said. "Please come in. I'm Alec Gordon. Someone put the fear of contagion into our servants, and they deserted us in a body."

He closed the door behind them and gave them a vague, unhappy smile. "I'm sorry you had to make this trip," he said, "but I'm glad you did. My wife has been very upset, and I hope you'll be able to reassure her. Perhaps it's silly, but—" He made a vague gesture toward a room at the left of the hall. "We're in here."

Mrs. Gordon rose tensely from the Chippendale sofa as they entered the room. Her face in repose would have been expressive and gentle, but now it had the look of a frozen scream and her eyes were dark with desperate pleading.

She whispered, "Thank you for coming, Miss Powers. I—I'm sorry I was so rude on the phone." She smiled tremulously. "This is Dr. Eades."

She gestured at a heavy man, who glowered at them from before the fireplace, clutching his untidy brown beard in his right hand. Augie stared back at him.

"You're *the* Eades," he said, recognizing him. "Psychiatrist, neuro-surgeon, the Eades Foundation Sanitarium, biggest charity ward in the country. That's right, isn't it, Doctor? Sure. I've seen your picture a million times. Say, what's wrong with the Sheridan boy?" His eyes were bright and questing.

"That's what we wanted to explain to Miss Powers," said Mrs. Gordon in a sick voice. "Would you explain it please, Dr. Eades?"

Eades tugged at his beard and made a series of anguished faces. It was obvious that he was hating the whole business.

"First," he barked, "it was the fever with pustules. Dr. Brandhorst diagnosed smallpox. He conferred with Dr. Joule,

who also diagnosed smallpox. Very good. Very proper. The child recovered. But then changes started taking place. The child is losing coordination. The face has become thicker, the lips have become thicker, the eyes have become dull without lustre, the mind fumbles. In short, the boy shows signs of progressive idiocy. Dr. Joulé, called in again, was baffled at the terrible change. Then Mrs. Gordon called me in—and I am baffled." He grimaced and threw up his hands to show the futility of explaining to laymen. "No one is killing the child. That is absurd." He glared at Ellen.

Pete lifted his chin. "Perhaps not," he said shortly. "But could a drug have caused this change, Dr. Eades?"

"A drug? No, that is impossible." Eades shook his head violently. "Such a thing would not have escaped Dr. Joulé, and he is the foremost authority on infant diseases in the country. And it could not have escaped me, no."

"But is it possible?" Pete persisted.

"No, it is not possible, young man. A drug? No. That is fantastic."

Mrs. Gordon was close to tears. "And who would do such a thing to a child?" she asked in a choked voice, "Who? And who suggested it to you, Miss Powers?"

"I told you, Mrs. Gordon—the child's mother."

Mrs. Gordon's face stiffened. "That woman!"

Even mousey Alec Gordon looked angry. "That woman was crazy," he said indignantly. "She was the one who poisoned Donald's dog, a very beautiful Saint Bernard. Droopy, Donald called him. It was the only thing Donald had any real interest in toward the— He insisted we give it a funeral and bury it in a real cemetery." His voice turned harsh, "Don't talk to us about that woman. She spied on us, and she even threatened to kidnap the boy. She was crazy."

"No—neurotic," Dr. Eades corrected

him severely, professionally. "I talked to her once on the street. In three months, under my care, she would have been adjusted and happy, and it would have cost her nothing. But if you are thinking, young woman," he shot a sharp glance at Ellen, "that she was drugging her child, the idea is utterly ridiculous, and Dr. Joulé will concur with me in that."

Mrs. Gordon looked at Ellen and tried several times to speak before she managed, piteously, "Y-you see? We love Donald. W-we—" She broke down completely. She sat on the edge of the sofa and covered her face with her hands.

Dr. Eades growled, "I think you had better go now, Miss Powers. More to-night would be cruelty."

Pete said, "Let's go, kids."

Alec Gordon showed them to the door, though it was evident that he did not want to leave his wife.

At the door, Ellen said impulsively, "Would it help if the boy had another dog?"

"We tried that," Gordon said dully. "We tried everything."

"But this is a very special dog. It was in a carnival and it knows any number of tricks. It's a very amusing little dog."

"It might help," Gordon said doubtfully. He started to close the door. "I hope you'll excuse me. Good night."

THEY walked silently to the car. Ellen sat between them, biting her lips and trying not to think of the child in his bedroom, sinking slowly into the morass of idiocy.

As the car drifted out of the driveway to the street, Augie said thoughtfully, "I once heard of a case down South. A guy killed another guy because the guy kicked his dog. But that doesn't apply in this case. Say, Pete, is there a chance the courts could take the kid away from the Gordons?"

Pete shook his head positively. "Only

if the Gordons could be proved negligent and incompetent—which they have not been. Both Dr. Joule and Dr. Eades are highly respected specialists. If there had been negligence, they would have told the court."

"Sure, but look at it this way. Dr. Eades is a top man, but he's broke. Every cent he makes, he puts into that sanitarium of his, and half the people in the sanitarium don't pay him a nickel. Suppose the Gordons offered him a few thousand clams—"

"And offered Dr. Joule the same? I don't think Eades would cover negligence, but suppose he did. Would Joule do the same? You know what a stiff-necked terror he is. He darn near wrecked the city government with that health department exposure last year."

"Yeah, I can't see Joule in it," Augie let it hang. "Ah, nuts."

Hunched forward over the wheel, he flipped the car through traffic at a crazy pace, as he always did when his mind was nagging at something that had him stopped. He parked in front of Ellen's apartment and watched Pete walk to the front door with her, but he scarcely saw them. Ellen went into the house, and Pete came back to the car and slid in beside Augie. Augie reached for the ignition key.

The scream, thin and muted though it was, stopped his hand halfway. He jerked around, gaped at the apartment house, then scrambled for the door handle. Before he could get it open, Pete was out of the car and sprinting madly up the walk to the front door. Augie dashed after him, catching him in the entry as Pete stabbed savagely at a half dozen doorbells to unlock the inner door. The door buzzed and they burst through it. They leaped up the stairs. Ellen's door was closed, but her key was still sticking from the lock. Inside they could hear the pounding of a heavy, furious voice and Ellen's cry of pain. Pete twisted the key and lunged into the room.

Ellen was in the center of the room, forced to her knees by the brutal, twisting grip the big man had on her arm. Her eyes were closed in pain and she was whimpering. Pete roared and leaped at them. The big man jerked around. He flung up his arm, but Pete's driving fist caught him hard on the side of the jaw. He took three jiggling steps backward, flailing to keep his balance. Pete went in under his arms and brought up a slashing right to the chin. The big man swayed, his face blank. Pete toppled him with another hard right to the jaw, and he collapsed heavily into the sofa.

Pete turned, crying, "Ellen. . ."

She was standing beside Augie, holding her arm. She said wanly, "I don't think he meant to hurt me. He was mad."

Augie breathed, "Man! Leo Savoy, dead to the world." Then, half humorously, "If he was mad before, just wait'll he wakes up. Suppose we toss him out before he gets around to that."

Pete looked at Ellen, "What'd he want?"

"Well," she tossed her hands unhappily, "maybe I did have it coming. I shouldn't have told Augie about him and Jessie Sheridan. That's what it was all about. I think they were going to be married. He wasn't very coherent."

Leo Savoy groaned, and all three looked down at him as he stirred and started to push himself upright on the sofa. Augie stepped quickly to his side, dipped his hand under Savoy's coat and came out with a gun. He dropped it in his pocket.

"Just in case," he said woodenly.

He stepped back and watched Leo Savoy sit up groggily and try to focus on them. His eyes were dazed, but the next instant consciousness flamed hotly into them, and with a snarl, he lurched forward to his feet.

Pete said sharply, "Hold it, Savoy!"

Augie said, "Cut it out, Leo." He nervously showed the gun.

Savoy's eyes swung toward him, muddy

with hate. His hand jumped to his shoulder holster, then fell slowly to his side.

"Suckered!" he said thickly. "Suckered by a doublecrossing dame and a news louse." His jaws clamped together and the muscles swelled at the ends of them. He straightened up and gave his heavy shoulders a shake. His grin was all teeth and no mirth. He pointed a thick, blunt finger at Augie.

"You print one word of this," he said heavily, "and I'll take you apart. I kept it out of the papers this long, and I'm still busy keeping it out. She is dead now, but I promised her. Her kid's still alive, and I owe him something. She didn't have a nickel when that louse divorced her. She had a right to get her kid back. She didn't do anything. There was nothing between me and her. She had a right to her own kid."

Augie stared at him, then whispered, "You paid for those two tries she made for custody."

"Print it. Go ahead, print it, that's all."

"Was there a date set for the wedding, Leo?"

The teeth showed more deeply in Savoy's grin, then he bent over and picked up his hat from the floor, where it had fallen when Pete knocked him into the sofa. He slapped it against his leg and strode for the door. He turned and pointed his finger at Augie again.

"Just remember what I said," he repeated, then slammed the door behind him.

Augie looked at Ellen and Pete. He shrugged his shoulders.

"A very violent guy," he murmured.

"Are you going to print it, Augie?" Ellen asked.

"Hell, yes. It's news, ain't it?" He looked down at the gun in his hand. "Any-way, I still have his gun. Maybe he doesn't have another one. You're not worried about me, are you, sweetheart? He'll think twice before he does anything. He wouldn't

be taking a poke at me; he'd be taking a poke at the *Herald*, and honeybun, that ain't no punching bag. Right, Pete?"

"It seems to me," said Pete, "you're sticking your neck out for something that's not too important."

"News is news," said Augie stolidly. "Now I gotta get outta here and get to work. There's another edition before breakfast. Can I, uh, take you anywhere, Pete?"

"I'm staying," said Pete. "Ellen can't be left alone."

"Oh, no you're not," said Ellen. She smiled to soften her denial. "I don't want to be babied. There's a good strong chain on the door. See? Nobody can get in, even with a key."

Pete scowled. "Okay, but I'll call you first thing in the morning. Nine o'clock."

"I'll be looking forward to it." She smiled again. "Now shoo, both of you. I'm going to bed."

They went downstairs to the car.

Augie drove Pete home at a pace that had Pete clutching the edge of his seat.

CHAPTER THREE

The Blood of Another

PETE did not go to bed immediately. He heated a pot of coffee and switched on the radio. He tried to read a magazine, but after a few futile moments he flung it into the lounge chair and restlessly paced the apartment. Finally he drank his coffee and went to bed, but he did not fall asleep until the first glimmer of dawn cracked on the eastern horizon, and even then he only tossed in fitful, busy naps. The phone jangled and he was awake on the first peal. He leaped out of bed and snatched it up from the table beside the door. It was Augie.

"Brother!" said Augie eagerly. "Have I got a red hot lead?"

"Haven't you been to bed yet?"

"Bed? What's that? I've been working all night. This story's hotter'n the key-hole of hell, believe me. I wanna talk to you. I got something that needs a little legal finesse, and I think you can work it. How's about having breakfast with me?"

"What do you want me for?" Pete asked groggily.

"You're a lawyer, ain't you? Well, I want a court order."

"Any lawyer can get you a court order."

"Sure, but when I start trusting lawyers, I'll be blowing bubble gum and playing marbles again. Nuts. I worked on this story and I want it all to myself. We'll have breakfast and talk it over."

Pete said wearily, "Okay, what's the address?"

"I don't live in the apartment any more. My lease was up and they heaved me out. Now I'm living in a real estate office." He chuckled. "It's on that Sunshine Acres Development that went bust this spring. South end of town, at the end of Washington Avenue. It's a two-room Swiss chalet with a fancy one-car garage behind it. You can't miss it. And say, Pete. . ."

"Well?"

"Bring Ellen along. I got a couple of things to ask her."

"That's out," Pete said abruptly. "She's had enough."

"Aw, wait a minute, fella. . ."

"I said no, didn't I? And if you try to ring her in on this, you can hunt yourself another lawyer."

"Okay, okay. But pick yourself up a *Herald* on the way over. What a story! See you in about a half hour." His hanging up sounded like a double exclamation point.

Pete showered, dressed, ate three bananas and drank a cup of steaming hot coffee. It revived him a little, but not enough to count. He stumbled, blinking, down the stairs to his car.

Washington Avenue ran out in a thick stand of scrub birch and semi-reclaimed

swampland south of the sprawling city. Here and there, among the silvery trunks of the leaning birches, was the darker, glowing green of spruce and cedar. The beginnings of streets had been ambitiously cut into this wasteland, and some of them even had names, but it was a bubble that had burst. Nothing had been cleared, nothing had been built except the real estate office and garage.

Pete swung his car into the tiny driveway and braked into a spray of flying gravel. He slid to the opposite end of the seat and opened the door, but for a moment he just sat there, listening to the high, sweet piping of the tree frogs and the throatier contralto of the big bulls deeper in the swamp. The air was rich, woody and heady. With a sigh, Pete slipped from the car and ambled to the door of Augie's Swiss chalet. He knocked, and there was no answer. He tried the doorknob, but it was locked. He peered in the window beside the door. Inside, rough bookcases lined the walls. There was a sofa, two lounge chairs, three floor lamps, and on the bookcase stood a bottle of vermouth, one of gin and several glasses, empty. An opened book lay face downward on the floor beside one of the lounge chairs, and on the arm of the chair stood an empty glass.

Pete knocked again, but the door gave back that peculiarly empty sound of an uninhabited house. Pete turned and looked impatiently down the empty street. Augie had said a half hour, and it was past that. Restlessly, Pete wandered around the outside of the house. In the back, concealed by the birches, was the model garage. The metal overhead door was down. Pete's head jerked up. No, the door wasn't quite down.

It was within six inches of its sill, and beneath it sprawled a plump figure, the edge of the door resting heavily across the back of its head. Too heavily. Too deep into the skull.

Pete sucked in his breath and ran for-

ward. He swung the door up in its tracks, then knelt beside the silent figure. It was Augie. He didn't have to turn it over to know that.

And he didn't need a second look to know how dead Augie was. The edge of the door had come down cruelly, smashing the bone. Just beyond Augie's outflung left hand lay a smashed pint whiskey bottle.

Pete turned and plodded toward the house. He had to call the police. He covered his hand with his hat and punched through the window beside the rear door.

* * *

Lieutenant Burge surveyed the room with distaste. He looked at the gin bottle on the bookcase, at the empty glass on the arm of the lounge chair. He looked at Pete, who stood beside the doorway with his hands buried in his pockets, watching the men load Augie into the meat wagon.

"I'll admit the coincidence," said Burge with forced patience. "And believe me, I'm going to look into it. But the guy'd been drinking and he'd had no sleep, so he pulls the garage door down on his head. It could be an accident, couldn't it?"

"And it could be murder," said Pete angrily. "What about Leo Savoy?"

"We'll check him."

"A routine check, Burge?"

Burge walked to the rear window and stood staring out at the garage. His hands were behind his back and he kept snapping his fingers. It was an irritated, crackling sound.

"When I have to account to you, Cameron," he snapped, "I'll turn in my badge. We'll check this in our own time and in our own way. And speaking of checking, we went through your girl-friend's apartment house last night, and what do you think—nobody saw or heard a man carrying or dragging a girl through the halls the night of the suicide. Not even a glimpse. He carried or dragged her down four flights

of stairs, too. Now that's one for the book, isn't it?"

"So what? He was lucky and he got away with it. And he's still getting away with it." Pete's head jerked up. "Here's something I didn't tell you, Burge. Miss Powers was threatened over the phone last night. She was offered fifteen thousand dollars to leave town."

Burge didn't turn from the window. "She should have taken it," he said dryly. "Where was the offer from—Hollywood?"

"I'm telling you, Burge, it was a threat."

Burge swung around. "You know, Cameron," he said flatly, "I'm getting kind of tired of you and your girl friend. You keep trying to get in my hair. Or is it the newspapers she's trying to get into? I'm tired of arguing with you. From here on, if you want to make any complaints, go to the commissioner or the chief. I'm too busy to bother with you."

He strode out.

Angrily, Pete watched the police car cut around his sedan, negotiate the U of the driveway, then straighten out and roar back toward the heart of town.

Then the sudden quiet of the room began to get to him. It was the silence of a clock that had been suddenly smashed. Augie was gone. Irrevocably. Burge was gone. The gin bottle was still on the bookcase, but Pete had no desire to drink. He rubbed his knuckles across his eyes. He hadn't had enough sleep, and during the past twelve hours things had been moving too fast and too violently. He was in no condition to reason. Maybe Burge was right. Maybe it wasn't his business.

He glanced at his watch. It was quarter to ten, and suddenly he remembered that he had promised to call Ellen at nine. He walked across the room to the phone. They could have lunch together and afterward go out to the zoo or go to a museum or maybe just have a picnic in the woods somewhere. Anything that didn't have anything to do with Jessie Sheridan.

HE CALLED her number. The phone rang on the other end. Maybe, he thought, they could take a trip to Asbury Park and play the penny machines or lie on the beach or dance on the pier or go fishing. Or drive up to Bear Mountain and go rowing on the lake. He began to warm to the idea. They could pack a lunch and take a dip in the pool.

Then abruptly, he realized that her phone had been ringing and ringing, and that there was no answer. He jiggled the hook and got the operator. He repeated the number, but this time he listened intently as it rang.

There was still no answer.

She always answered within two rings. Always. It rang and rang—six, seven, eight. He counted the rings. There was no answer. Slowly, he hung up.

There could be all sorts of reasons why she didn't answer. She could have gone down to the corner for a copy of the *Herald*, or down to the phone in the basement to call him. Any number of reasons.

But suddenly, frighteningly, he didn't believe any of them.

He whirled and ran to the door. He jerked it open. He didn't hear the cracking bark of the gun, for he was already falling. He didn't see the wisp of smoke rising from the underbrush across the road, and he didn't feel himself hit the gravel of the driveway.

He was half conscious for quite a while before he fully realized that he was back in the room, lying on the sofa. His head ached terrifically, and the light was a stab of pain. He groaned.

A voice demanded gruffly, "What happened to you?"

It was Leo Savoy. He was sitting on the arm of the sofa, a thin, light brown cigar jutting from his scowling mouth.

Pete mumbled feebly, "My head. . . ."

"Sure, your head. You got a gutter in it that long. What'd you do, take a running jump into the door?"

Pete tried to think, but there were no thoughts, no remembrance. Only pain and nausea. He closed his eyes and his stomach heaved dryly. Something rattled metallically against his teeth and Leo Savoy's voice came furrily:

"Take a shot of this. . . ."

Pete opened his mouth and the brandy ran hotly down his throat. He gagged and sputtered, but then a spot of warm strength began to spread from his stomach into his arms and legs, into his brain. His eyes still closed, he took another deep swallow. The pain washed back. He opened his eyes. Only a dull ache remained. Leo took a pull at the hammered silver flask, then slipped it back into his pocket. He crossed the room, looked at the edge of the door, turned and looked at Pete.

"You didn't run into this, friend." He took the cigar from his mouth and pointed to the edge of the door. "Clean as a whistle. What went on here?"

"I don't know."

Leo walked back to the sofa, bent over and looked at the shallow gash across the side of Pete's forehead. Leo had washed it clean, and the bleeding had stopped.

"You weren't sapped, that's a cinch," he said professionally. "It's my guess somebody took a shot at you." His voice sharpened, "That news louse pal of yours?"

Pete sat up groggily. The room swam before his eyes. "Not Augie," he mumbled, "no—"

"No? Well, the jerk knifed me in the back. Didja see the paper?" He flung the newspaper at Pete, so violently that it opened in midair and fluttered to the floor, crackling. "I warned him, and now I'm gonna let him have it. It'll cost me, but brother, it'll be worth it."

Pete looked at him and said fuzzily, "Too late, Leo. Too late."

"Too late for what?"

Pete gestured with a wavering hand. "Garage door came down on his head. They took him away. He's dead."

Leo said very slowly, "He's what?"

"Dead. P'lice say he pulled the garage door down on his head, and they oughta know. They're experts on g'rage doors. They practically invented g'rage doors."

"You're soused," Leo said disgustedly.

"Sure. Just a li'l bit, but I know what I'm talking about. Lieutenant Burge told me. He's the Edison of g'rage doors. There isn't a g'rage door in the country that can put anything over on Lieutenant Burge."

Pete thrust himself to his feet, stumbled and started to fall, but Leo caught him and started to drag him toward the tiny bathroom.

"For my money," he growled, "you could lay and sleep it off, but I wanna get this straight."

He filled the basin with water and dunked Pete's head into it. He pulled him up and dunked again. It took fifteen minutes, but Pete came out of it. He leaned against the wall and dried himself with the towel that Leo flung into his face.

"Now," said Leo grimly, "what's this garage door business?"

Pete flung the towel back at him. "Ask the cops, Leo," he gibed. "They'll be around to see you." He still felt a little foggy. He turned and walked into the living room.

Leo followed him. There was a deep glow of hate in his eyes, and his hands were bunched into knotty fists. "So you told them about last night, eh, friend?" he said heavily.

"What'd you expect me to do—ask your permission?"

Leo's face flamed and his hand jerked up toward his shoulder holster, then jerked back, as if he had touched something red hot. He licked his lips and tried to frame them around a smile, but the fury in him dragged at it and twisted it into a wolfish grimace.

"Listen, friend," his voice was honey on sandpaper, "I was sore at Augie for printing that guff in the paper. Okay. I had a

right to be, see. It didn't do nobody no good noways, that story. But it wasn't nothing to mace a guy for, see?"

"Sure," said Pete dryly, "you were just going to say naughty, naughty—just like you were reaching for your gun a minute ago."

"That didn't mean nothing. Now this Augie—I don't say I liked the guy, but he was straight, not like some of the news lice that hold out their hands every time they don't print something. Augie was okay."

"So you were just going to beat him up instead of cutting him down."

"So I made a mistake. We all make mistakes, don't we? Hell, I'd give a thousand bucks if I hadn't busted in here today." His tone intensified, "A thousand bucks," he repeated meaningly. "You and your girl friend could do a lot with a thousand bucks."

Pete's jaw dropped. Ellen! He plunged for the door, butting Leo aside, and ran for his car. Leo pounded after him, caught him as he was scrambling into his sedan. He wrapped his enormous hand around Pete's shoulder and growled, "I wanna get this settled."

Pete fought, but Leo crowded him against the side of the car, pinning him there.

Pete panted, "Let me go, Leo, or I'll kill you. She's missing. Do you hear me? Ellen's missing."

"Sure, kid, sure. But you won't get no place in this ice wagon. Take mine. C'mon."

He dragged Pete over to the Cadillac convertible that stood nose to nose with Pete's old sedan. As he pushed Pete into the seat under the wheel, he thrust something down into Pete's breast pocket.

"But don't forget I wasn't here today, kid," he said. "And take your time about bringing the heap back. Take a trip somewhere if you want. I—"

Pete backed violently, then roared down the road. Leo pulled his hand across his

mouth. He took a cigar from his pocket, looked at it, then savagely tore it to shreds.

CHAPTER FOUR

Murder by Proxy

THE big car was like nothing Pete had ever driven before. The speedometer crept to eighty, and he was raging at the wheel because it seemed like thirty. He swooped to the curb before Ellen's apartment, ran into the house, sprinted up the stairs and hammered on her door.

"Ellen, Ellen, it's Pete, are you—"

He rattled the doorknob and the door swung inward. It was a shock for a moment, then he remembered how careless Ellen was about locking her door. The instant he stepped into the apartment and called again, he knew she wasn't there. The silence had a quality he recognized all too quickly. An empty coffee cup stood on the low table before the sofa, and beside it a plate that showed signs of a recent egg and toast. On the sofa itself lay the late edition of the *Herald*.

She was gone.

Pete walked slowly to the sofa and picked up the newspaper. On the front page was Augie's story.

TWO CLAIM JESSIE PROMISED TO WED

There was one picture of Leo Savoy and another of Howard Sheridan. Under Leo's picture there was a brief line, "Was it hard-boiled nitery owner Leo Savoy . . ." and under Sheridan the line finished, ". . . or was it millionaire sportsman Howard Sheridan?" There was also a picture of Jessie, and one of a small, bewildered-looking boy, who turned out to be Jessie's son, Donald.

Augie's story was provocative, playing Leo against Howard Sheridan. It ended with a rehash of the divorce and custody trials and a brief account of the illness of

Donald, now under the guardianship of the Gordons.

Pete skimmed through it rapidly. There was no indication of the sensational follow-up at which Augie had hinted, but Augie had wanted to talk to Ellen about something, something she should have or might have remembered from her conversations with the dead woman, Jessie Sheridan. Suppose he had? Suppose he had called her. Suppose she had recalled just one little thing, one little scrap of conversation, and suppose she had gone out to verify it. That would be like her. That would be something she would do.

Pete snatched up the paper again. Howard Sheridan, according to the story, was living in the Hotel Hamilton, the natural place for him. It was an exclusive, expensive apartment-hotel. Pete threw the paper back on the sofa and ran for the door. He had no plan, no design—nothing but the frantic urgency of finding Ellen.

The desk clerk at the Hamilton looked at him with distaste, suspicion and alarm. Pete's hair was tousled, his eyes were wild, there was blood on his collar and the dried gash on his forehead was still unbandaged.

"I want to see Howard Sheridan," he said loudly. "I want to see him right away. I want—"

The clerk interrupted smoothly, "Of course. I'll see if he's in," and under the desk he pressed the button that summoned the house detective. "And what did you wish to see him about, sir?"

"Tell him it's about the death of Jessie Sheridan."

The house detective, squat and poker-faced, strolled up behind Pete, but the name of Jessie Sheridan had made a quick change in the clerk's attitude. He picked up the phone, and in a low voice, called Sheridan's suite. When he hung up, he said to the house detective, "Show this gentleman to Mr. Sheridan's suite." There was disapproval and a warning in his voice.

The house detective touched Pete's el-

bow. "This way, sir." He sounded polite.

Pete snapped, "All right, all right." He stared across the lobby toward the elevators.

The clerk and the detective exchanged meaning glances, and the detective strode purposefully after Pete.

Howard Sheridan was tall and gray-haired. He held the door open. His eyes were red-rimmed and the dark smudges under them betrayed the emotion behind his calm. He showed only faint surprise at the condition of Pete's face.

In a subdued voice, he said, "Come in please. You knew Jessie?"

Pete followed him suspiciously into the suite, and suspiciously behind him came the house detective. Pete's eyes darted around the room, through the open door into the bedroom. Everything was in order, neat, unruffled, like Howard Sheridan himself. Sheridan watched him, puzzled.

"You're looking for something?" he asked.

Pete said truculently, "I'm looking for Miss Powers."

"Miss Powers?" Sheridan glanced inquiringly at the house detective, then back to Pete. "But who is Miss Powers?"

"She was following up a newspaper story."

"Oh," said Sheridan in a flattened voice, "one of those people."

"When was she here?" Pete demanded.

"Really, I wouldn't know. There were so many of them. I wouldn't even recall her if you described her. So, if you please—" He sounded definitely irritated and although he didn't definitely point to the door, the implication was there.

Pete snapped, "I know she's been here, and I'm going to take a look around."

Sheridan's jaw dropped as Pete started toward the bedroom, then he turned to the house detective and said in an ugly voice, "Throw him out, Cassidy."

Cassidy grinned and leaped after Pete. He ducked as Pete whirled and threw a

wild right at his jaw, then expertly he sank his own right into Pete's stomach. Pete folded over it, gagging. Cassidy seized his arm and twisted it up behind his back. He marched the staggering, lurching Pete down the corridor to the service elevator, then, downstairs, threw him out into the alley. He stood back and hitched up his pants.

"You got off easy this time, scrapper," he said, grinning. "But don't come back. Don't try it."

The door slammed.

Pete picked himself up and lurched down the alley toward the street. A dog darted at him, barking belligerently.

Pete said weakly, "Beat it, pooch."

THE dog crouched and growled, then backed away, still barking, as Pete continued to walk toward him. Pete stopped and a wash of relief rose in him and he felt almost light-headed for a moment. He laughed aloud. Of course. He remembered now. A dog.

Ellen had promised to bring little Donald a dog, and it would have been like her to have taken the dog to the sick child that very morning, without waiting. Sure. A dog. A circus dog, she had said. A dog that did tricks. The Gordons. That's where she had gone—to the Gordons with the dog. He quickened his step toward the Cadillac, parked in front of the hotel.

The weaving traffic seemed to take malicious delight in holding him back every foot of the way. Red lights flashed in his face, cars pocketed him and crawled in front of him, trucks parked in front of him, and even when he reached the Gordon home, a long roadster turned into the driveway ahead of him and crept slowly up the driveway to the foot of the veranda steps. Mrs. Gordon stepped out, and Pete leaped from the Cadillac at almost the same moment, raging with impatience.

"Why, Mr. Cameron!" she said.

"I'm looking for Miss Powers." He

forced calm into his voice and he tried to grin. "I thought she might be here."

"Well, I wouldn't really know. I've had Donald at the park all morning. He—" She faltered. "He seems to like putting his hands in the water." She smiled wanly and, head down, she went quickly around the front of her roadster to the other side.

She opened the door and helped the child out of the car. Pete felt suddenly sick when he saw the boy. It was like the child in the newspaper photograph, yet terribly unlike. The features were blurred and slack, and the hair was like dead moss. The boy's face was fixed in an expression of pained concentration, and he walked beside the woman in that clumsy, stabby way that showed he didn't have full control over the movements of his feet.

Pete said swiftly, "Let me help you."

He swung the boy up in his arms and carried him up the steps. The child lay limp in his arms and mewed softly. The front door opened and Alec Gordon, looking distressed, came out and stood there wringing his hands.

"Thank you, Mr. Cameron," he mumbled. "Sometimes he won't walk, and he's too heavy for my wife to carry."

The woman smiled her thanks and quickly took the boy to the rear of the hall and disappeared through a side doorway with him.

Alec Gordon mumbled, "We don't like people to catch Donald in these moods. Sometimes he's much better. Today he . . . he had a bad spell last night. He had very little sleep. Did you wish to see me about something, Mr. Cameron?"

Pete licked his lips. "Yes. It's Miss Powers. I was wondering if she had been here. She said she was going to bring a dog for the boy and—has she been here?"

"A dog? Oh, yes, I recall now. A dog for Donald. She hasn't come yet, Mr. Cameron. Perhaps she is on her way. Is something wrong?"

"Well . . ." Pete hesitated. "Not ex-

actly. She wasn't at her apartment and—"

"Perhaps she left a note for you."

"No, there wasn't any note."

"Didn't she leave word anywhere, Mr. Cameron? I mean, that she was coming here?"

"She might have called me, but I was out. I'm a little worried."

"Worried, Mr. Cameron? But why?"

"Well, it's this business of Jessie Sheridan's death. I'd feel a lot better if I knew where Ellen was."

"I can understand that, yes." Alec Gordon nodded. "I'm sorry I can't help you, but perhaps you'd like to wait. She might be along at any moment. Can I offer you a drink, or a cup of coffee?"

"Yes. Thank you. I—"

A dog barked. It barked again and there was the quick scraping of claws across the hardwood floor. A small white dog burst into the hall from the rear of the house. It dashed up to them, barking joyfully. It held its head to one side, as if puzzled that they didn't pat it, then it sat up, waving both paws as if beating time to music. Both men stared, transfixed. The dog waited a moment, then angularly walked toward them on its hind legs. It turned twice, dancing, and barked brightly, prancing around them now, asking for a reward.

Pete said hoarsely, "That's what she was going to bring—a trained dog, a carnival dog, a dog that did tricks. She—"

He stopped, aghast, and his jaw dropped. Alec Gordon was holding a gun. Gordon's face seemed to have shrunk, and his eyes were glittering brightly.

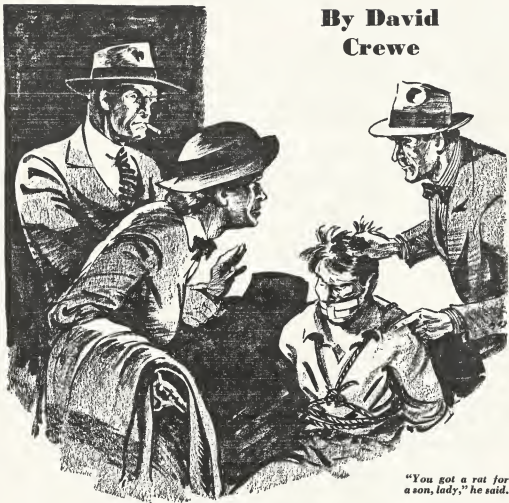
"I knew you'd interfere," he said irritably. "You couldn't leave me alone, any of you! It didn't concern any of you, but you had to interfere."

Pete croaked, "Ellen. Where's Ellen?"

"I should have finished you off when I had the chance," Gordon went on in a peevish, complaining voice. "I might have known you weren't dead. I saw you move

(Continued on page 111)

By David
Crewe



"You got a rat for
a son, lady," he said.

A NIGHT'S LODGING

For generations, the MacPhersons had known neither fear nor defeat. Was young Tom man enough to carry on that shining heritage?

FOR VALOR. That was what the badge said, if you could read it through the tarnish.

It belonged on a cop's uniform. But the man who had worn the uniform, and the badge, Patrolman Alex MacPherson, had been dead twenty-two years, and for three

months the badge had been in the third drawer of Myra MacPherson's dresser.

Staring bleakly out over the tenements, Myra touched her finger, where the badge had pricked her when she'd gone for a scarf, and shook her head. She alone knew why that badge was in the drawer, black-

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ened and forgotten. And it wasn't pleasant, remembering.

There was a man snoring on the couch across the room. You could see through the dirty stubble of his beard the lines of a fighting jaw. If the face had been less haggard it would have been a very young face. Almost too young, in fact, to have the odor of stale whiskey emanating from it.

Looking at that face, it was hard for Myra to realize that this was Tom, her son—hers and dour, stern Alex's, who had died, in the hell of a honkytonk fire that worse men than he might live.

The face softened a little in sleep, and Myra, for a moment, could almost see another face there on the pillow. The face of a wide-eyed boy who had wanted to be a cop like his father.

In the closet beside the dresser hung something that looked strangely human in the darkness. It was Alex's dress uniform, just as he had left it the day he went out to die. Myra looked at it, and her lips curled, remembering what one of Tom's cronies had said, seeing it, "I'll be damned! A Keystone Cop getup!"

Yes, she supposed it did look funny, with its twenty-two silver buttons and the three-inch belt of Russian leather with a gun holster big enough to hold a cannon. It wasn't smart, like the hell-for-leather, streamlined Sunday suits they wore on the force today—but it was a hero's uniform. A hero—whose son was a bum!

The time had been when young Tom MacPherson would have sold his soul to get into a department roll call. But now that time was over. It was on that night, three months ago, when his friend had made fun of Alex's suit that Myra had known.

On that occasion Myra, having heard it, had paled in good Scotch wrath and started for the door, only to stop at Tom's voice.

For Tom, too, had laughed, although

furtively, like a man afraid to disagree.

"It's a funny outfit, all right," Tom had said, snickering. "The old lady is screwy about flatfeet, though. Don't make any cracks when she's around. She even wants me to be one, like the old man. A pavement pounder. . . . Nuts!"

Myra had flown to the door when Tom's friend had shot his mouth off. To stop Tom's anger, make him swallow an insult, because the offender was a guest. But then she had known! Tom *was* angry; she could see the pulse beat hard in his temple, watched his big hands tighten. And he had taken it with a sickly smile. Afraid!

And that was about the time young Tom had started to go to hell.

YOUNG Tom MacPherson opened his eyes now. His mouth tasted like the dregs of a Bessemer furnace. There was a glass of water on the sewing machine by his head, and he clutched at it greedily. Then he looked at the clock in the kitchen and swore. Four o'clock! He couldn't keep Fred's boys waiting.

He got to his feet, staggering a little, and the old lady by the window half turned her head. When she saw the red in his eyes, her chin shot up and she looked away.

"There's no food," she said.

Tom blinked, fished in his pocket, threw a crumpled bill on the table.

"Get yourself a steak, Mom," he mumbled thickly. "I run into a little job last night."

Myra pushed the money back.

"Likely you have need of it," she said tightly. "I want none of your silver, boy—not until it comes from a workingman's pocket."

He shrugged, stared queerly at her a moment.

"I'm kinda sick of this," he said, and the stubbly bearded chin jutted out like hers. "Some day you'll be glad to get it. You can't live on Dad's pension forever, you know."

But she said nothing, and Tom MacPherson swaggered out into the night.

Fred Peroni's roadster was at the corner. There were two men in the back seat, and something in a sack. One of the men got out and climbed in beside Peroni at the wheel, and Tom, still swaying, lurched into the back.

They drove in silence over George Washington Bridge and deep into Jersey. After an hour Peroni braked the car and lit a cigar. Then he turned around and jabbed his unlit flashlight against Tom MacPherson's knee.

"Let's see it," he said.

No one answered, and the man in back lit a match and cupped it under Tom's chin. Then he kicked Tom's shin, hard, and Tom opened his eyes, groaning.

"Hand it over, stupid," the man said, and Tom fumbled in his coat. After a time his trembling fingers drew out a black billfold and the man beside him snatched it and handed it to Peroni.

Big Fred Peroni looked over the contents carefully. Then he laughed.

"Forty grand," he breathed. "On the line, like the personal ad said." He put the billfold reverently in his pocket. Then he flashed the light on the back seat, and when he saw the slumped man there, a thin smile curved his full lips.

"Sleeping like a baby," he said gently. Stooping, he unlaced his shoes. "Time to wake up," he said crooningly. "Hold baby's chin up, Ed."

Ed dragged Tom's head up and Peroni smashed the heel heavily into the vacuous face, again and again, until Tom opened his eyes.

Something warm and sticky ran down Tom MacPherson's face; in his head a thousand needles of pain stabbed through the liquor haze. He snapped his head back, snarling. But when he saw Peroni's face, the snarl faded into a sickly whine.

"I—I did it," he said.

Big Fred Peroni laughed.

"Yeah," he said. "You done your part fine. You're a good finger man, Mac. Trouble is, you're a better three-finger man." His voice grew soft, almost purring. "I told you before, sweetheart, booze and snatches don't mix."

Tom wiped his face, smiled placatingly. "It was cold, waiting out there," he said. "I see you got the kid here. Is he all right?"

"The kid," Peroni said, "doesn't matter. You got nice square shoulders tonight, Mac. Almost bigger than natural, like. Ed—"

He made a sign to the man in the back, and as he did so, the weariness disappeared from Tom's eyes. He drove his feet into the floor, leaping.

But when he saw the gun glint in Big Peroni's fist he subsided, whimpering, and let the two men search him. Big Fred watched, eyes narrowed.

"So," he said. "Two shoulder holsters and a service gun under the arm. You won't be playing with them for a while, baby." He took the guns and put them under the seat. "Last time you went on a bat you shot your mouth off," he said. "*How much did you talk last night?*"

Slumped back, hopeless, young Tom MacPherson tried to speak, but only a wheeze came out of his throat.

Peroni lit a cigarette. The flame was steady. "We been driving for two days, ever since the snatch," he said. "We switched cars three times. We ducked a dragnet at Hoboken and ran through a net at Madison. Waiting for you—while you got stinking drunk and maybe talked." He tossed the match away. "Well, you got a nice voice, baby. I like to hear it, too. *How marked those bills?*"

Tom MacPherson blinked. "Hell, Fred," he said, "you know I wouldn't—wouldn't dare—"

Peroni slapped him.

"Marked bills mean Feds," he said, "and Feds mean a squealer. You know how

A Night's Lodging

"much a fence'll give for forty grand in marked bills?" Peroni's fist closed slowly. "Twelve grand. I kinda counted on forty. For that twenty-eight grand I could do a lot to you, pal. Enough to make you want to die."

He hit Tom again and this time the stubbly chin stuck out squarely, meeting the blow. But he said nothing.

Peroni slapped some adhesive over Tom's mouth. "You'll talk before I'm done with you," he said grimly.

MYRA didn't know why she went out on Barrow Street that night. Perhaps because she was hungry. Perhaps because there were things in that dingy room she could stand looking at no longer.

Big Fred Peroni, crusing slowly along, half dead from fatigue, barely noticed her at first. Then he looked closer and his little eyes glinted.

Big Freddie was a smiling sort of guy and he liked his laughs.

"Dumpe him on the floor, Ed," he said. "This is going to be funny. It's Mac's old lady."

He braked the car squarely in front of the curb at Hudson, so that Myra had to stop. Then he lifted his hat.

"Mrs. MacPherson," he said unctuously.

Myra stared into the darkness.

"I have a friend here," Peroni said.

"He's sick. I'm afraid he's going to be sicker. He wants a room—nothing elaborate, just a place to lay and—ah—take his medicine."

Big Fred waved a bill.

"My friend needs a lot of—ah—expert care. I'd like you to rent a room for us. Somewhere down this way. A quiet place. Somewhere where we can get this boy a little—ah—heat. Here, rent us a room. Bring the keys back here. And keep the change."

For a long moment Myra hesitated. No MacPherson had ever taken money for

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something like this. But she was hungry and the sight of the bill was doing things to her soul.

"I'll see what I can do," she said and walked away into the darkness. Peroni leaned back and prodded the gagged man on the floor.

"She'll miss you around the house," he said. "They tell me you spend most of your time there."

After a time old Myra came back around the corner. She handed him a keyfold.

"It's a dollar a night," she said. "The address is on the keys. There's only one bed, but it's clean." And then—half peering into the back seat, "I hope your friend's all right."

It was not until she had eaten that Myra remembered. There was a sick boy who needed heat—and the bed had only one blanket.

Ten minutes later Myra went up a squalid flight of steps, her arms laden with comforters.

It was at the second landing she heard them, and she stopped in her tracks.

There were three voices speaking inside, and one of them was Tom's!

"We got the Braiburn kid and the dough," Tom's voice said through the wall. "What the hell are you squawking about?"

Myra sat down on the steps, numbly.

The Braiburn kid! There were two-inch headlines in every newspaper in Manhattan with that name on it. Alfie Braiburn kidnaped! The English boy, only seven, who'd starred in two Hollywood features and was snatched in front of a movie theater, while a hundred policemen milled in the preview crowds.

And suddenly, out of the horror of that revelation, Myra knew what she had to do, and why. She had to kill this thing that was her son.

Her face was like parchment, but her feet were steady and there wasn't a creak when she went down the stairs

A Night's Lodging

MINUTES later she came back, her chin high, proud. A MacPherson took care of its own, its heroes—and its traitors.

They were still talking inside, but she rapped on the door.

You could hear the silence drop like a sea mist. Then a man's voice said, "Who is it?" hoarsely.

"It's Myra MacPherson," she said. "With blankets for the sick man."

The voice said, "Hell, she's asking for it," and the door opened. Myra stepped in.

Tom was sitting on a chair. His hands were like gobs of red putty, where the fingernails had been, and there was blood seeping through the tape on his chin. Something like a trussed sack lay in the corner, moaning, and the man who had hailed her in the car kicked it before he turned around to face Myra.

"You got a rat for a son, lady," he said. "I dunno how the hell you got in here, but you ain't going out. Give us those blankets."

It was Tom's eyes. The drink and the dark secrets seemed to be washed away—and she suddenly knew there was a greater justice, transcending even MacPherson honor. This sodden lout who was her son was hurt—and she was facing the man who had done it.

With glory shining fiercely in her faded eyes, she pulled the trigger through the blankets.

A gurgling scream came out of Peroni's throat. Myra saw the man holding her jump as Peroni fell, and somebody yelled, and she knew it was herself.

And then, fighting, biting, gouging, she saw Tom rolling across the floor—and saw that one hand was free. One bleeding hand, reaching, groping.

She felt artfully over Tom, and the other man threw himself across her legs, fumbling at the catch on his automatic. And then, suddenly, the man's mouth opened in

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New Detective Magazine

a yawn of agony—and stayed there—with Tom's bleeding fingers wrapped around his neck.

"You dinna need to kill him, boy," said Myra faintly. "I fetched him a clout with the stove lid."

And that was the way they found them. Myra, two dead men, and a boy whose name was on the tongue of the world. And a bleeding, unshaven, delirious giant with a Federal badge sewn into his shoe.

The next night old Myra sat looking out over the tenements. Her son sat across the table from her.

"I had to do it that way," he said. "From Washington it came, my first case, and I was crazy to tell you. But they sent me to catch a devil—and to do it I had to go to hell. Literally. All that it means. Because Peroni could use a bum."

Then Tom MacPherson scratched his head, wincing from his bandaged hand. "You never told me," he said, "how you got in that front door."

Myra flushed guiltily.

"He, the man you call Peroni, wouldna take my room," she said. "And I could use some honest siller. So I thought of Mrs. Clancy, who had gone to the country, leaving me her keys. She'd given me but a dollar to mind her plants, and—"

Tom laughed and slapped his knee.

"Yeah," he said. "But you came up with Dad's gun, knowing nothing of danger, or even that I was there. How, by what blessed chance, you even could have dreamed . . ."

There was the veil of the grey peat bogs in Myra's eyes, and Edinburgh granite in her voice. "The MacPhersons take care of their own," she said and turned to her work.

She was busy shining some object that gleamed and sparkled in the dusk.

FOR VALOR the badge said.

Might it always shine like this, she thought.

Cry Murder!

(Continued from page 103)

after you fell, but I tried to tell myself that you just twitched. But I was in too much of a hurry. I had to get back here. I knew there would be others. Interfering."

Pete said grimly, "Where's Ellen?"

Gordon jerked up the nose of his gun and cried shrilly, "Stand where you are or I'll shoot, Mr. Cameron!"

He backed a step away from Pete—frightened, desperate, as if it were Pete who held the gun instead of himself. He backed again, and Pete took a slow ominous step after him.

The front door knocker thundered. Gordon's eyes flickered and in that instant, Pete dived at him. He felt the hot, scorching breath of the muzzle blast across his neck. His clutching fingers found Gordon's skinny legs—then lost them as Gordon screamed and twisted like a frantic eel. As Pete floundered on the floor, the little man darted into the living room and slammed the door.

Pete scrambled to his feet and rocketed at the door, but it was locked. He lunged twice against it with his battering shoulder, but it was as solid as the side of a vault. He turned and sprinted down the hall toward the rear of the house.

Faintly, he heard Mrs. Gordon scream, and after that the heavy, startled voice of Dr. Eades, but by that time he had run into the kitchen and the swinging door cut off the sound of their voices. He pulled open the back door and jumped out to the patio.

GORDON was just climbing frantically from the window of the living room. He saw Pete, squirmed around on the sill and fired again. Pete dropped to the flagged walk, and from somewhere behind him came the splashing tinkle of smashed glass. Gordon leaped to the ground and fled across the lawn toward the huge garden beyond, looking back over his shoulder at almost every pace. Pete pounded after him, crouch-

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ing. Gordon cried out shrilly and fired back over his shoulder. He leaped a low hedge and ran down a long flight of stone steps that led to a circular lily pond. He ran around the pond and up the terrace on the other side.

Pete bounded after him, his lungs aflame. He felt as if he were plunging, and he had to drive his heavy legs into every stride. He had run beyond his limit, and it was only savage fury that drove him on—just as it was terror that drove Gordon, for Gordon was also in bad shape. He floundered up the slope, falling twice. He yawed widely as he ran, then staggered into a thin grove of blue spruce. He fell again, tripping over a small evergreen. Pete was less than twenty panning strides behind.

Gordon writhed up on one hip, tried to steady his shaking hand and fired for the fourth time. The bullet went wide and high. The fifth time he squeezed the trigger the hammer clicked empty on a dead shell. Gordon bleated and clawed himself to his feet. He staggered up just as Pete lurched into him. They flailed into a tree, then crashed to the ground. Weakly, Gordon tried to fight off Pete's hand, then moaned and collapsed as Pete's fingers found his throat. Pete shook him savagely.

"Where's Ellen?" he rasped.

Gordon could only moan, and his head lolled weakly. He looked piteously into Pete's face. His mouth worked, and finally he whispered, "Didn't hurt her. She's in the cellar. Didn't hurt her."

Pete's hands fell from Gordon's throat, suddenly limp with relief. "But you were going to kill her," his anger flamed for a moment. "Just as you killed Jessie Sheridan and Augie."

"No. Please, no. I didn't hurt her. But Jessie, she knew. And that newspaperman knew. He wanted a picture of Donald. He knew. He was interfering. Why did he have to interfere?"

Pete started, "I don't see why you—"

Cry Murder!

Then it burst on him.

There was only one possible answer. From the evidence shown, from the evidence of Dr. Joule and Dr. Eades, the courts could not take Donald from the Gordons. There was no reason to kill on that score. But, still, it all hinged on Donald.

Pete gasped, "That child, that boy—he isn't Donald at all. It's another boy, substituted for Donald. Donald is dead!"

"I didn't kill him!" Gordon frantically pawed Pete's arm. "He just died. You can ask Dr. Eades. We got the other child from him. He'll tell you. We promised him twenty thousand dollars a year for his sanitarium, and he gave us another child to pose as Donald. The child was mentally deficient, but that was better, and it looked enough like Donald to fool Dr. Joule. Dr. Joule had seen Donald only once before when Dr. Brandhorst called him in for consultation. He was easy to fool. But Jessie knew there was something wrong. She knew it wasn't her boy. I had to kill her. And that newspaperman came around asking for a new picture of Donald. He knew, too. I had to kill him.

"But it wasn't all for myself. I was giving twenty thousand a year to Dr. Eades' sanitarium. That's a charitable institution. It benefits hundreds and hundreds of people every year. It was for them, too. Look," he was pleading, "I'll give you money. As much as you want. I'll be Donald's guardian forever, because he's mentally deficient. I'll have control of millions. You'll never have to work again. You can have—"

Pete snarled and dragged him to his feet. As he turned, he found himself face to face with Lieutenant Burge, two uniformed policemen, Mrs. Gordon and Dr. Eades. Mrs. Gordon looked about to collapse, and the white-faced doctor was holding her up. Burge tilted his chin, and the two cops took the sagging Gordon from Pete's angry hands. Burge stepped between them and grabbed Pete's arm.

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New Detective Magazine

"Okay, fella," he said. "It's all over. Don't mess it up for us. We'll get your girl for you. Come on. Be a good guy."

* * *

Burge bought them a drink. It had taken six hours to get to it, but he kept his word. There was a martini in front of Ellen and a whiskey sour in front of Pete, but both drinks were untouched.

Burge was saying, "That Mrs. Gordon didn't know a thing about the murders. She was the one who called me in when you started playing Run, Sheep, Run with her husband. She thought you were trying to kill him. She didn't know he was the one who'd been off on a murder binge. But she was in on the switch of the kids, and she clinched the deal against her husband when she told us the kid'd been buried in the dog cemetery in place of that Saint Bernard that Gordon poisoned."

He looked at Ellen and Pete, but they weren't paying any attention.

"You'll be glad to know," he said a little louder, "that Dr. Eades is out of the picture. The D.A.'s covering him on account of that charitable sanitarium of Eades'. The doc is okay, but he's not practical. He knew he was doing wrong, but he didn't know about the murders. All he was thinking about was his sanitarium and the charity patients. Twenty thousand clams a year would keep him going. And Howard Sheridan, the guy who was really being gyped, instead of pressing charges, has guaranteed the doc another twenty thousand on top of the first. Darn nice, don't you think?"

He looked at them again. They didn't answer. Ellen was holding tightly to Pete's arm, and he was whispering to her.

Burge said even more loudly, "I said, darn nice of Sheridan, wasn't it?"

They still did not answer. The bartender reached out and tapped Burge on the arm.

"Don't try so hard, friend." He grinned. "If it's congratulations you want, why I'll be glad to shake your hand."

■ ■ ■

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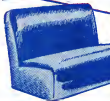
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